



REZA PAHLAVI INTERVIEW
THE INTERVIEW ARCHIVE

Reza Pahlavi, Crown Prince of Iran
September 8, 2024
Interviewed by: Brandon Stanton
Total Running Time: 1 hour, 49 min and 12 seconds

START TC: 00:00:00:00

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Life Stories Presents

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CREW:

Got me an A & B bill? Yeah, gotcha. Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi. Interview, take one. Marker.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

Hi, my name is Reza Pahlavi. I've been an advocate for democracy, secular democracy in Iran and human rights. I've been fighting for the cause of liberation of Iran for 44 years and I've dedicated my life towards that end.

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INTERVIEWER:

If you were to tell your life story in 60 seconds.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

Well, you're born into a royal family. You are the firstborn, therefore the first in line for succession. You've been prepped and groomed to assume that role one day and then all of a sudden a life-changing event happens where the continuity is broken, the revolution happens. You now find yourself out of the country in exile. So it's a completely different set of circumstances. It's almost like some cataclysmic event pushes you out of an orbit and now you have to find a



completely different path. It's a game changer in that sense. What you were supposed to be doing and what you were expected to do is now completely different.

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INTERVIEWER:

For anyone who might not know, how would you have described who your father was?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

Well, my father was the king of Iran. He came into power right after his father abdicated, that was during the Second World War, towards the end of the Second World War, and he assumes the role of the monarch at age 23, 1943 or 4, I think it was roughly, and he was therefore the king of a nation that was moving towards becoming modernized from a very traditional backward society with very little education or what have you, and you know, it was just the function at the time that he played as being the, you know, the monarch of that country and the king of Persia or Iran.

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INTERVIEWER:

Describe your father's legacy. What it was he did in those 37 years that you were going to inherit and shepherd for the next 37 years?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

Well, putting Iran from a very underdeveloped society that was kind of very traditional to now fully engage in development, modernity, progress, liberalizing society, and so all of the social, you know, aspects of change in life, the situation that women had in Iran, which was unparalleled in the rest of the Middle East. For all those reasons, Iran was on track to be a very dynamic, progressive society. If the revolution had not happened, Iran should have been today the South Korea of the Middle East, instead of we have become North Korea, not because the people have changed, but because the system had changed. We were in that direction, and instead now we are completely going back. So I think



that's the quickest way that I can say where he was taking Iran, and we should have been now.

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INTERVIEWER:

Can you talk to me a little bit about your experience of the pressure as a young man?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

Well, I would say that at a very young age, by that I mean when you're like seven, eight years old around that time, I was already sensing that there's something in terms of people's perception or expectation that is different when it comes to myself. I mean, you're born in a royal family, you're the first child, therefore heir to the throne, and so I'm talking about 1967 when the official coronation ceremony of my father took place. My father started in 1943. It was not until 1967 that he actually had that ceremony. And the reason I'm bringing this up is because the first time that I actually realized what it is that I'm supposed to be doing as my role is as we were returning in the whole process of carriages coming from the Golestan Palace where the ceremony took place.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

And, you know, I was accustomed to the fact that my father and my mother would be cheered, you know, when they would go in the streets, and it would be a public event. But then I noticed that people are actually looking at me and are showing me all that emotion and all that support, and I said, okay, something, there's something special here. And so from the very young age, it instills in you the fact that, well, you know, there's an expectation and there's a duty to perform, whatever that performance might be, and you find that later on as you get educated, as you participate in various ceremonies and what have you. But at the same time, as a young kid, you have to grow, you have to go to school, you have to get educated, you have your friends. So how do you balance the public figure aspect with, you know, having a kid's life?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

And in a culture, in a society, which is not as modern or as, you know, open-minded as we are these days, I'm talking about like more than 50 years ago, half a century ago, that balance between what's private life or normal life versus public life and what is expected, especially at the young age, and it's much, you know, more complicated than I can explain. But you don't realize it that early, you just maybe feel a little bit more like when you have to perform at the end of the school year, some kind of a school, you know, show, performance, and you prepare for the role. You go on stage, and on stage you have an audience, and they expect you to perform, and so therefore you have to perform.

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INTERVIEWER:

How about a quick summation of what your role in the country as Crown Prince was for the first 17 and a half years?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

Many official duties in terms of, for instance, inaugurating, you know, visiting with factory workers, awarding prizes to them, showing up for a sport event here and there, visiting, you know, schools or orphanages and things of that nature, which was really, the Crown Prince function was really not as prevailing, but it was part of the things that I was doing. In terms of official capacities, a couple of official ceremonies, aside from the coronation, was the 2,500 years celebration of Iran's history in Persepolis, which was a big event, and also the 50th anniversary of the Pahlavi dynasty, which was in Tehran in the mid-70s.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

Later on, in fact, I had asked my father if he would allow me to get more directly involved with sports in Iran, and in fact, there was an entire plan for me to, upon my return from my Air Force training in the U.S. to Iran, to get more active in that field and bring our sport facilities and complexes in Iran to a point that we can have far more athletic, you know, programs for schools, for universities, and really boost the entire infrastructure for sports. Being a sportsman myself, I love



to play soccer. That's what I played during my entire childhood. So I was very much interested to be able to do that, while I'm still in the capacity of the crown prince at the time, upon my return. Of course, that didn't pan out, obviously, as a result of the revolution.

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INTERVIEWER:

Was there a moment when maybe your father set you down, where you were kind of inaugurated through some sort of discussion about the seriousness of the responsibility, not the prominence in society, but the responsibility that was coming to you?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

Well, obviously, as you are prepped to be the next in line to assume the throne, you have to prepare for it. And by that means getting educated in the affairs of state, so at a certain age, when I was in my meetings, there'll be meetings with ministers, people in the military, to tell me about various aspects of, you know, what's happening in the country, what they're doing, what's their function. So you get more of a sense of the mechanisms of government, which is more specific, because now you're not just, you know, hearing it, you're actually getting trained for it. It's a grooming process, literally. And that's parallel to a normal education. By that, I mean school education, but also preparing for that role, because it's a specific responsibility. And also, it was not only a training on the basis of hearing it from, you know, the government aspect.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

A lot of what I liked to do, and in fact my parents were quite comfortable with the idea of me mingling with normal people outside official ceremonies in a sort of impromptu, non -official, non -scripted, natural way, and interacting with normal people, whether it's a villager or a fisherman or somebody that I bumped into, sometimes they would know who I am, sometimes they wouldn't even know who I am. And in that way, you also get a lot of prospects of, you know, what society was like at the time. And so it was a combination of my own



personal experience, but also quite a lot of, you know, preparation and briefings. So, you know.

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INTERVIEWER:

So there's the briefings, and then there's the education from ministers about the mechanics of how the country's run. And then there's the exercise of power. And I think that's where kind of the gravity and the loneliness of the role that was awaiting you comes in. Were there lessons in that aspect of it, conversations with your father about the lonely position of leadership?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

You know, it's a question I'm often asked. The truth of the matter is that the amount of quality time or personal one-on-one time that would have had with my father to have these kinds of conversations were extremely limited and scarce. So I would say that from that point of view, I had very little input coming to me to have that kind of, you know, son, let me explain to you how things are and how I respond to it. It was more by observation that I could see how he would interact. Most people don't know that is that whatever is your public face, whatever people are accustomed to see and the way you project yourself as they see you on television or what have you, it's a very different person when they are off camera, when they're in your own house, when we have a family dinner, when they're sitting together and there's no performance going on. You are who you are. And you know, what I find kind of odd is that sometimes people respond to a persona based on what they see in public.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

But if they were to know who you really are in actual life, they might have a different interpretation. So a lot of what people see in you is not necessarily who you are, but how you are perceived. A lot of it is projected expectations that they actually sometimes in certain cultures like to put somebody on the pedestal to be different than them. It's kind of an odd thing. The difference makes it interesting as opposed to be one and the same. But by the same token, it creates



some kind of a separation. So how do you manage to connect with people while having a unique position and how do you balance that? That's not teachable. That's not something that you can be trained. That's something that you develop as skills and knowledge and experience by dealing with it all the time. When you are in that kind of a function. So that's my take. That's my own, you know, experience of seeing that in action.

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INTERVIEWER:

Why do you think there is a need for someone to be different as opposed to familiarity?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

Because again, it's as if people have a tendency to think for that person to do something special then the role is by definition kind of unique. It's not everybody else who can step in and do that. You know, it's like it's a little bit like, you know, you have the quarterback for the team and he's your star player, right? And if that person gets injured you have a backup, but the backup is never the the first player. All the expectation drops down. He's no longer the starting quarterback, he's the backup. And in that sense, you know, when people say this is the person who is expected to do this and this and that, then he can't be just replicated. It's not an easy replacement. I don't know if I can convey that sense of how people want to see something unique in someone.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

And of course, there's a lot of judgment and of course, there's a lot of criticism and there's a lot of expectations and you know, not all people think the same. Some people want you to be more aggressive. Some people want you to be more, you know, how would I say, down to earth. And in certain cultures, you know, they think that if you're too simple, then it takes away from the weight and magnitude of the role. On the other hand, if you appear to be kind of stuck up or what have you, they say well, you know, that's kind of a narcissistic thing. And again, you know, how people judge you based on what they think you are as



opposed to what you try to convey. How do you manage to do that? Maintaining that status that makes the role still special because that's what they expect, but at the same time stay relatable. And that's not very easy in particular cultures that are not as open in terms of open discussion.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

There's no taboo subject that you cannot talk about and you know, that era was still quite restricted in terms of subjects that would be normal to talk about these days, but back then it was kind of, you know, very risky proposition to dwell into issues or subjects that at the time would have been not acceptable to that culture or that society. So, you know, my father and my grandfather, their legacy is pretty much based on the fact that they were modern thinking. It was all about modernization and bringing, you know, taking a society from a sort of traditional way into a future looking modern approach and modernizing it, everything that started part of his plans and the white revolution and the emancipation of women and so on and so forth. Imagine that in a very traditional religious society to be able to do that in the span of a couple of decades and the acceleration process.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

So, you know, while you first started in a position that was much more traditional and bring it to a point of modernizing and getting more in tune with probably most of the mindset of the Western societies in the world, being from the Middle East, you know, how do you balance that and make it happen?

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INTERVIEWER:

Now, was this need to avoid familiarity or maintain that sense of difference that you talked about something that was coached to you or is that something that you picked up just through example as well?

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REZA PAHLAVI:



My observation is mostly not about me, but about my father and how he was at the time perceived or expected from a people's standpoint, you know. And again, you know, remember I left Iran at the age of 17 and a half right after my high school graduation. I was coming to the United States for the Air Force pilot training program I was supposed to go to and then return a year after back to Iran. Of course during that time the revolution happened so I never got to return to Iran since then and my whole direction in life changed. But what I'm trying to say is that back then I was still in the back up. I was still the person in training next in line whenever that was going to happen. So it was not a it was a different way of me, you know, sensing what's happening by observation, mostly of my father and what he was doing. But there's one point...

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INTERVIEWER:

I feel like if I was the backup quarterback I would still be sitting on that bench super nervous that the quarterback was about to sprained his ankle at any time and I was going to have to walk in in front of 90,000 people and it happened, you know, at any moment you could be thrust into the forefront. Was that a weight on you?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

I actually think that as the country was evolving my job would be easier than that of my father only because the momentum was there. The country was in full, you know, production in terms of economic growth, in terms of education, in terms of modernization and infrastructure. So compared to where he had to start at the end of the second world war and where Iran was at the time, compared to the mid 70s where it was a completely different thing, my generation were seeing things that he didn't see or even my mother didn't see in their times in the 50s or 60s and that basically meant that whatever the challenges my generation and myself would be facing would be a completely different set of new challenges because the basic was now there. The basic mechanics of it was there.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

It was just a matter of improving on it and making it maybe greater. It's a little bit like, you know, if just to give you a contrast, I remember one time we were just developing one of the islands in the Persian Gulf called Kish Island. We used to go there as a family for vacation during New Year's and, you know, one time we were there, I'm talking about 1970 -71 around that time. And, you know, my mother once said, you know, I'd like to go and check out Dubai to see what's going on over there. You know, it's a free port and what have you and back then Dubai was nothing. It was a tiny little port. It was nothing like compared to today when you talk about Dubai, the world knows what Dubai is like. So imagine Iran of the 50s being similar to Dubai being nothing and all of a sudden what it had reached. So the trend, the scope, the progress, everything was there.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

So it would have been a different challenge anyway. And my father always said that the way I ruled and the way I had to perform is very different than whatever role my son would play one day. So already that difference was set in terms of expectation. Everybody knew that what I'll be facing had it been a continuation would be very different than what he had to face and the challenges that he had to deal with. So it's a little bit of knowing what was then but also the differences of what was to come and you cannot predict the future as much. You can simply anticipate that, okay, when the moment comes, then what happens? And then you are playing with the tools that you're given in terms of what it is that you're operating with and working with. That's really the biggest challenge in terms of how do you explain the possibility and the expectation that people have of having cycles, election cycles, governments can change, you can vote different parties into power.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

So there's one aspect of the ability to change. You're not stuck with one system. But on the other hand, a continuity aspect that brings more balance to certain societies and certain cultures. And the part that we wanted to eventually



improve on and we needed to improve on was the extent to which society gets to actively participate into governance by means of being involved in the politics of the country in terms of elections, in terms of political parties, and what have you. And that was probably one of the difficulties that the country had at the time in terms of the level of education, the readiness, the ability to liberalize more and more. And given that period of time, it was a cold war. It was a very different scenario than compared to today when you had an imbalance in terms of influence of certain governments on certain parties.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

And it was always a balance between to what extent can you liberalize without being victim of outside interference and what have you. And I guess that's the learning process. So the problem becomes when you are playing an institutional role, to what extent are you detached from the day -to -day management? Or whether you get too entrenched in it, and therefore you become vulnerable because now you're answerable, because they don't see it as supervising but as actually making the decision. And that I think is a conflict. That I think is a contradiction. And I think the biggest challenge that practically my father faced was that in order to liberalize, you have to step away. But he actually was too entrenched in it to make too many decisions. And at the end of the day, he would be answerable for whatever is happening, even if it was not his decision or his fault, but it would be perceived as such. That I think is lesson learned in the process when you look back to that time of to what extent can't you be there, but try to be less needed by virtue of the fact that you're replacing it with now mechanisms that can address that, as opposed to be the go -to guy and by default being making the final decision.

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INTERVIEWER:

Whether it be about leadership or something personal, if you were able to ask your father one question, what would that be now?

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REZA PAHLAVI:



Was it worth the risk of making yourself more vulnerable for purposes of advancing the cause as opposed to say, well let it be as it is, let me play safe, not get involved, let things happen as they do, but they might have happened much slower or not happen at all. He was too ambitious in pushing the country forward that he gambled a lot with what would happen to him and clearly the political crisis did occur and a revolution did take place. That overthrew his regime. Although today a lot of people retrospectively say, what the hell were we thinking? Was it necessary to actually do this in order to achieve change? But this is all retrospective.

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INTERVIEWER:

What's something more personal you'd ask him as a man? He was your father, you know, he was so much more than the head of Iran. What is something that you wish you understood about him? That if you could have a moment of candor or honesty with him now that you'd want to know?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

Well, I don't know if it's more of a question than a criticism that I would have. And knowing who he was and what he meant, I think that the level of transparency that he should have had was almost non-existent. If people actually knew why he's doing what he's doing, what is his actual dream, what is his actual ambition, and communicate it to a language for the simple person to understand and not let media interpret it or put a sugar coating it with courtship and what have you, and all that sort of projected no longer being the person as he thought. Because that really concerned him. I remember the first thing my father would ask in the morning coming down the elevator to go to his office right after breakfast was from the night security guard. And he wanted the first report of the day, he wanted to know the amount of rain that had fallen in the country because he knew how much our agriculture and a lot of things would depend on that.

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REZA PAHLAVI:



And how many people knew that? They didn't know that. That's not what they saw. And I think that to me is the part that hurts me is if only people knew why he's doing all of the above, what is his objective, why is he sending so many students to study abroad in the best universities of the world at the government expense only to turn against him and come back as revolutionaries and say, you know, I'm educating you so you can't run that country one day. Why are you throwing it all away? But it was not communicated enough. And that's, I think, the biggest regret.

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INTERVIEWER:

This is your father and he was like such a huge I mean figure in the country, but also like in your life and you talk about this distance from him. What were some things that you wish you understood about your father as a man, as a father?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

That's what I'm saying that he was so in some way timid or shy to show his actual face that he had to almost put a mask, part because of the expectation but part because a sense of protecting maybe some vulnerability and I say I wish he was he had done just the country before being the persona say and explain what it is that he was actually thinking because if people knew more about that part maybe the judgment would have been very different and you know, we lived in an era where communication, PR, everything that in today's day and age people have been accustomed to social media, influencers. None of that existed in the 50 years ago. It was a different world. You will listen to the news and you will see the king is now inaugurating this factory or is on a state visit in Europe or whatever and he was all very you know impersonal in the sense of you only saw the title and the role, but not the person and the way people are understanding more what's behind the face of whoever is doing whatever. It was not existent and that part was really missing, I think.

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INTERVIEWER:



And I think that's something that you identify that was missing, you know as the Crown Prince looking at your father the king. Was there anything that you feel was unresolved between you two as father and son?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

Well, I think the part that was and as I told you, unfortunately my interaction with my father was very limited in terms of time. Only because of the schedule. It was an issue of you know his functions and when he had a break I was like every kid in my age going to school, coming home, doing my homework, watching some tv, going to bed, waking up the next day and so on. So the only time that we had together was really during vacation time or every now and then, you know, I would go in the morning on my way to school just to pop my head in and you know, but it was not like we can sit there and talk for hours and have a thorough discussion and I miss that part. I miss that part of having had more ability to you know, simply have a father and son type conversation outside of everybody else, you know, peeking in and you know.

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INTERVIEWER:

Was he one of those fathers that even in those unguarded moments was very guarded?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

No, no, in fact, I think he would let his hair down and that's what the part that I said that I wish people knew that aspect of him that they never saw, ever. Because then they would see the human being as opposed to the head of state. They would see the man as opposed to the leader or the ruler, whatever you want to call it. And that is something that you know creates the wrong perception especially if you're not what people actually portray you to be. It's actually different but you're doing all you can and people don't see that part and that's so frustrating because you say if only they knew.

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INTERVIEWER:



What is the most vulnerable moment you've ever seen your father in? Your memory of seeing that side of him?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

Well, I think the last two years and I didn't see the last few months because I was outside of Iran. So I was only monitoring what was happening in the final months before he had to leave the country. And I think the two things are two factors that psychologically and emotionally affects someone. Imagine for 37 years dedicating your life to the advancements of your country. And then you have this illness and you know that your time is limited and you have to somehow pass the torch. How much time do you have left? And then that sense of um, how would I call it, you know, feeling like you've been stabbed in the back, that you've been abandoned, that you've been sort of thrown under the bus uh and have all the weight on your own shoulders with no chance to actually explain.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

Maybe it was too late. Some people say you should have done that earlier. But again, that's retrospective analysis. But I think that the last year was extremely tough. What do you do? Some people say hang on including foreign leaders who say are you going to maintain the situation? The balance of the world depends on that. I said what do you expect me to do to turn guns on my own people? Do you actually think that I'm going to do that for the sake of preserving my throne? Hell no, and he didn't and he left the country voluntarily. Now people say if they knew Khomeini and what he was going to do, he should have stood there and done that. But you know, it's easier said than done. Retrospectively, a lot of people say we wish we had done it differently, but nobody says at the time at the heat of the moment. So the crisis was building and building and building and that pressure. What do you do? What do you not do? And you're the only one at the end with the decision to make. A lot of people say hang in there. Some people say, you know, step aside. What do you do under the circumstances? And vulnerability was, I think, the highest in the last year.



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INTERVIEWER:

How did he demonstrate affection to you?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

You know, a simple phone call or a moment of, you know, being out there in his room as he would, you know, usually in the morning when I would go and see him, it was the only time of day that I could actually see my father during a regular day. It was either early morning when he was having breakfast. Usually he would be reading a newspaper and I would just step in there, say a quick hello on my way to school, spend maybe five, ten minutes at the most and, you know, maybe just, you know, a smile or something like that. He was not very tactile. He was not the kind of father who would come there and hug you and kiss you and that kind of stuff. As opposed to my mother, which was more cuddly and all that. That's a little bit the way he was brought up, you know, his grandfather, a military man, very disciplined. So it was on that aspect, less there, but you could feel, you could feel by what he was trying to communicate. Or same time at night, I would come before he would have, in the evening, something to do and he was preparing for that.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

He used to, you know, exercise in the room and I would be having some conversation about either events or the day or something that happens internationally. And again, it was a personal moment of father and son as opposed to king and crown prince. I'm trying to give you the human aspect. So yeah, there were some moments when we would be out there and then this is just me one-on-one with him. But sometimes we'll be with my siblings and we'll be all together. Poppy sat in and spent a few minutes with us and sit with us and all that. So again, those are the moments where, you know, you're completely off the record in terms of a personal private setting with family and that's where all of those emotional, you know, contexts and communications would happen. I



wish we had more of it, but you know, I'm thankful for all those opportunities that we did have.

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INTERVIEWER:

Did you fear him?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

No, not at all. He was not the kind of fearful character. As I said, you know, when you knew what his intentions was, he was somebody who did everything out of concern and love and passion. You know, passionate people sometimes could get hot-headed or sometimes very aggressive, but that's not something that you would fear. This is something that would be more of an exciting or challenging or provoking. And I think again part of what would have been, some people might say that, I don't know, they fear the authority, they fear the power, but you know, if it's meant for the betterment of things, what would be afraid of if you can communicate the intentions that people say, hey, you know, there's rationale and logic and vision behind it. And again that I think is the biggest part of what you would learn in the process about anyone, especially if it's your own father of, you know, how you interpret the intentions, you know.

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INTERVIEWER:

What's a question you would ask him about his relationship with you?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

Well, I would say that would you have considered spending more time not delegating others to prep me into the role, but actually you yourself, because he had more of that with his own father, my grandfather. The relationship between my father and his father was much more direct. He would have direct feedback, actual interaction with his father much more than I did with my father. The interesting thing is that I could see how much my grandfather had influence on my father for that reason and how much less influence my father had on me for



the lack of that level of direct interaction. I don't know if it's good or bad, but it's just a fact.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

I think that I would have said why not more time after all if you're going to pass the torch to me, I would rather hear it from you than anybody else or what it is that you expect or what it is that you think will be different in my case and have that kind of a exchange, which unfortunately we never had.

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INTERVIEWER:

How are you a different father than your father? I know you have three daughters.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

Well, you know, it's again the fact that I certainly had much less restrictions to put the time to be with the family and, you know, when I grew up, we were not even living under the same roof literally with our parents. We had different locations to live within the palace structure, but they were living in the main building and I was in my own building somewhere else and my siblings were in other buildings and we were not under the same roof. My daughters grew under the same roof as myself and my wife, you know, in sense of hanging out, having dinner together, having lunch together, later on in school, all that, more of their own actions, but, you know, they like coming back home only because I identified that family time that we always had together. So we were much more hands-on as parents and have the opportunity to put in the time that unfortunately my mother and my father had much less of to be able to, you know, spend that kind of time with us. So in that way is quite a contrast.

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INTERVIEWER:

How important is that role of father, of being a father in your life?

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REZA PAHLAVI:



You know, I think the first element that gives people anchor starts with family, starts with the nucleus of a family. If you have a functional family, you ought to have, logically, a much more stable life. On the other hand, if you have an unstable family, a dysfunctional family, I hardly see people finding any stability down the line in their lives. So it's definitely something that is very important and if the family unit operates on that level and then you grow it beyond the family unit to society in general, then society overall will be, I think, more stable and healthier as a result. But it all starts by putting in the time valuing the importance of that and, you know, it may sound very traditional, the family tradition, yeah, but it can be extremely modern and extremely liberal but still maintain a certain tradition and importance of keeping the family together and creating as many opportunities to be together because that's how you keep it as a unit.

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INTERVIEWER:

How do you feel temperamentally or just by nature? You are a different man than your father. Not your thinking, just by nature.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

I think we are all, in some way, affected by the environment in which we are. My father was, by virtue of being propelled into that role at a young age, I think it was like 23 when he assumed the throne and when my father, my grandfather, was abdicated and went to exile. But from that moment, he was very much, again, in the limelight on the pedestal, very much alone in a way, in that sense. He had some friends and he had some relations, but he was much more isolated. I think that the way I was brought up is I had a much greater scope of friends and people that I knew and, not that I was then in a position to do anything, but you know, in terms of relationships and knowing, feeling less lonely or singled out, if that makes any sense.

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REZA PAHLAVI:



And I felt like while he would have an entourage of people he knew, but in terms of his function, he was very much on his own. A lot of people worked in government, a lot of technocrats and people that we knew, but in terms of what can you depend on in terms of being, having less pressure focused on you, yourself, I felt that in a way he was kind of much more isolated than I felt I was in terms of having, you know, more more of a perimeter to operate in, if that makes any sense.

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INTERVIEWER:

Is that loneliness or isolation of his something you came to understand deeper as you got older?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

Yeah, people in that function tend to be tremendously lonely because again, you know, the thought process when you are in that position is that nobody can really understand what's going through your mind other than the person, he or she being in that position. And how much of it is visible for others to see? It's a little bit like an iceberg. You see 10 % of it, 90 % of it is below the surface. And in some way, you feel like they only get to see that 10%, they don't know about the rest of the 90%, and you may never have a chance to show that. Sometimes it may be even better, and sometimes not necessarily. And that to me has been the biggest...

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REZA PAHLAVI:

From point of view of intellectual curiosity, what's at the end of the day more important? Not to rock the boat and playing it safe and letting things go the way it's expected or anticipated, or where is it that you push the envelope and change the norm and change the rules and you know, address the circumstances as they develop and you might have to have a change of style or strategy as opposed to what's habitual. You know, I remember this line, I don't know where I read it or where I heard it, but I always believed in the fact that this statement happens to be true, that a good leader is not someone who does what people



expect you to do. A good leader is someone who does what is in the best interest of the people, even if they don't get it at that time. Retrospectively, history has to write and see whether or not you did or not what was good or not.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

At the moment, it may not be understood, but you know, I think my father was the kind of person who didn't want to play it safe. He could have played it safe, honestly, but he didn't. Why? Because he didn't want Iran to fall behind. He knew we had a limited amount of time to become self-sufficient, not to depend on oil and gas as our primary source of revenue, which would one day be depleted and build enough momentum and industry and infrastructure that the country is finally on its feet and ready to run, and he had limited amount of time to do it with. And he took a lot of risks doing what he did. As I said, retrospectively, I think today people have a different read on him and what he tried to do as opposed to what was the interpretation 50 years ago at the time all of this happened. And it's always like that, unfortunately. It's always like that. You can't go back.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

What I'm trying to say is that the biggest lesson that I've learned in life is never look back. We can only look forward, but draw from the lessons only because for history not to repeat itself, you have to avoid making the same mistakes over and over again. That's the learning curve. And at the end, that's all I can say regardless of the emotions of the moment or how it was done or not. But the fact is that at the end what remains is a legacy of what was good, bad, or ugly, and ultimately you move on and learn from all of that.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

You talk about loneliness being one of the probably dominant things that he was experiencing, which would be expected. It's the thing that you hear all people in positions of high power talking about. Even if it wasn't as stark as what he was feeling, have you felt those feelings of loneliness in your own position?



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REZA PAHLAVI:

Well, I mean obviously my life completely changed as a result of the revolution, you know, whatever was destined for me suddenly changed to a different set of circumstances. It's almost like going from Earth to Mars. Now you are operating in a completely different set of circumstances. As a result of this change, I can't say that the mindset was, okay, well now I'm going to deal with my own set of challenges, circumstances, because, you know, we're out of the country, we're in exile, a new regime is in place. So the whole situation has drastically changed. It's no longer a continuity but an adaptation to a new set of circumstances. So I could not revert back to, well, why would be the norm?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

Now everything is different. Now you have to address the new sets of challenges or requirements. So even though I was prepped for or trained for or groomed for assuming that role, everything changed all of a sudden. That's a completely different ball game. And I think as a result, you know, I started at a very young age. When my father passed away, it was a few months before my 20th birthday, and I was in Cairo at the time, and of course the revolution had already happened. The war between Iran and Iraq had already broken up. So it was like the country was in a completely different mindset, emotionally, revolutionary fervor, conflict, war. It's almost like, as I said, on a different planet, a totally new set of circumstances. So everything ended in the sense that my father's departure was a complete rupture in some way.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

So whatever was projected then when it comes to me changed drastically, because this is no longer the crown prince. Now it's the family who is outside, and I had to basically create a new identity and purpose as opposed to what was going to be, which didn't really change, was the new challenge now. And this has been the story of my life for the past 44 years.

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INTERVIEWER:

How much has loneliness been a part of that story?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

Well, I mean, at the end, it's up to you what you choose to do or not. But it's important to address the feeling of not being completely in atrophy and isolation by surrounding yourself with as much talent, skills, know-how, knowledge, advice that you can get, because you know, I never believed that in my era or in my style, let me put it this way, I am a strong believer of a system where we are system-centric as opposed to individual-centric, moving away from depending on the individual but believing in structure, institutions, and systems. Meaning that in order to lead by example, you would like to tell people don't focus on the individual.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

Look more as a collective effort, as teamwork, as distribution of responsibilities, as a collective effort so that you don't allow for people to put you in a position of isolation in the first place, yet again, expecting you to be the ultimate man at the top of the pyramid because that defeats the entire purpose. So from day one, I wanted to say I want to help us in that direction and as much influence that I can have, I will obviously use the position, the name recognition, whatever you want to call it, but in order to strengthen the institution building aspects of things as opposed to yet again, depending on the authority or the people at the very top because that goes against the grain. So I always said that whatever I equip myself with this challenge is to try and see what I can bring into the picture, the best out of people.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

In terms of their skills, in terms of their contributions, whether they are strategists or economists or scientists or whatever it takes because you know at the end, there's a story to be told, there's a path and a journey to recovery and reconstruction and rebuilding and my vision is always two folds. One is what are



the requirements to have a full -fledged democracy where people actually participate and take responsibility, but also help those in power accountable, which is one aspect, but also have a roadmap to reconstruction and a vision of how the country can evolve. And that goes beyond just institution and governance and rule of law and what have you. It's also a matter of having imagination, having a vision, having a sense of all the potentials that the country has. So I think that the best way to address that is to encourage every skill that is out there, incentivize people.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

And the best way to incentivize people is for them to say that we cannot just depend on one center for everything. We have to pitch in and have our share. But by the same token, if you expect them to be proactive, you have to allow them that opportunity to perform. So you cannot have a structure that limits their participation, but then expect them to be fully contributors if that makes any sense. So, you know, you have to make sure that you remind people of why it is different this time. So when you look at Iran's history and where we are now, taking into account the experiences of before the revolution, after the revolution, and where we are now in 2024, with the vision of Iran 50 years from now. Again, it ties back to what I was telling you earlier, that I don't look back, I look forward. And I say, you know, what is in store for us? And bring that as a sense of a collective effort. It's an entire, it's a very, very demanding project in my view. Of course, I play a part in it.

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INTERVIEWER:

I think I know a lot of people that just in the course of adolescence go through this period of wilderness, of being adrift, and it's just naturally an extremely difficult time for anyone without the trauma of your father's death, without the trauma of having to leave the country, and you know, and the threat of violence, and all of these things. Did you have a period in the wilderness after that, where you felt very lost?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

I never felt lost, but I felt that I had to get my bearings and my priorities straight in terms of, okay, given the circumstances, how do I deal with it? How do you adapt to it? From a personal side of things, you know, I was a young person, surrounded by people twice his age, as advisors or what have you. I was very much disconnected from my family in the sense that we were all spread out in different places. My mother lived in Paris. My sister lived in New York. My other two siblings were, you know, in the process of studying. But, you know, every now and then we would get together as a family, but we were all living in different places. I lived in Morocco for almost three years between 1981 and 1984, before moving more permanently to the United States.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

The first four or five years was really, how do you realize that now is a new chapter, and as a result, what it is that you want to do? And again, not based on all the expectation that people have of what was, as opposed to, this is today's reality and what we're facing, and so how do you get your bearings in terms of the direction and the vision? And I think what helped me in particular, and that's why I say that even though you still feel a certain solitude, but the best way to stay focused is not to reminisce, but to look forward.

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INTERVIEWER:

You don't talk about emotions very much. Do you feel, is it that you are temperamentally pretty even-keeled, or is it that you keep your emotions closer to your chest?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

The truth is that in order to maintain that sense of responsibility, what I expected of you, I purposefully and willingly and intentionally deprived myself from things that other people my age would have done at the time. Clubbing, dancing, going to nightclubs, all that kind of stuff I wouldn't do, not because I wouldn't enjoy it, but it would have been inappropriate for me to do all of that,



especially at the time that Iran is in crisis and at war, and this guy's out there having a good time. So a lot of that part that is how you fulfill yourself in terms of some pleasure in life, I had to voluntarily let go, so I had to substitute that with something else. So when you cannot have that level of socializing or external input, how do you compensate?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

So how would I nurture myself in terms of something that would give me a sense of, I don't know, you call it relaxation, meditation, pleasure, and it was mostly nature and music, which is and has been all along part of my life. I have a few friends, very close friends, and when I got married through my wife, we met other people, so we have a circle of very close friends that are there to fill your life, so you don't feel alone. I never believe in lamentation, that's the worst thing.

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INTERVIEWER:

Enter, you never believe in, well, that might be the answer to my question. I feel like most people from the other 10,000 people that I've interviewed, if we were speaking about this time in their life, these three years in Morocco, we would be talking about scenes and experiences of great emotional turbulence, where as in you're talking about nature and music, which are positive things, and I think the closest that you've gotten to describing this discrepancy between what I would expect to be hearing right now and how you experienced it was that you don't believe in lamentation. Where did that come from? Has that always been something you believed? And how did it apply to these three years?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

I would say lamentation is a sign of weakness. You have to tough up, you have to man up, so to speak. The minute you go into a direction of self-pity and all that stuff, I think that's pretty much when you lose everything. It's on the contrary to face the challenge and accept the challenge and say, what can you do with it the best you could do under the circumstances? That's the only thing you can expect from yourself. You may or may not succeed, but at least you've given it the best



shot possible. And that's the only thing that keeps you sane and consciously comfortable, or having no regrets, because you know you're doing your best under the circumstances. That was always my attitude. That's the way I internally process things and think about things. But also, I would tell you that the early years were very different, because I was not even on the radar, too many.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

Whereas today, there's a whole new generation, the Generation Z of Iran, and their expectation and the way they look up towards me. And I'm no longer the young boy. Now I'm almost like the father figure for them. A lot of them, when they write me and send me messages, they refer to me as father. They call me father. And you know, the minute that you've been called that, it's a completely different relationship and expectation. And this is where you realize that regardless of how long this journey takes, it may take a whole lifetime, you never know. But the fact that how many millions of people could be affected by the fact that you just are there or not? How many people will stay hopeful because you can inject that passion and hope in them?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

Or how many people will otherwise commit suicide if they think that there's no hope? And you know, just the fact that just by virtue of being there for them, you may have that kind of an impact on them. That's the sense of weight and responsibility that one feels, even if I end up not playing any specific role. But the fact that they are telling me, hey, we depend on that, we need you to be out there for us, I can never detach myself from it. I need to have my own life and what human being can perform in complete sanity. I'm not a robot. I need to have my own. But, you know, to what extent you say, well, I can't just be a hermit and go live in some cave. My role is really more of a someone who encourages and invites that participation. We all have to do it together. That's the spirit of what I'm trying to do. All these years, it has been my, the core principle of how I look at things and how I respond to challenges.



01:01:40:00

INTERVIEWER:

There were different moments at times when people realized that the end was coming. There was this steady building of unrest that first seemed very manageable. In fact, it seemed as part of your father's policies to allow people to speak and protest. It almost seemed to be something that was planned. For you, what was the moment that you realized your life was about to change?

01:02:12:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

Well, it happened, everything happened really fast. When I left Iran in the summer of 1978, which is about six months before my father left Iran for the last time, at that time, I did not experience or witness the level of protests and anti-Shah slogans that my siblings got to hear at night from the windows of the palace in northern Tehran, where they could hear the crowd on the streets chanting that. So in a matter of months, everything happened really fast. So it's not like we were anticipating. There was difficulties, there was some crisis, but it was not like the way it ended and it happened. But I think that hysteria was very much driven by the core radical religious beliefs that we had. And if you look at ever since the revolution in Iran, that aspect of radicalized Islam that happened with the Khomeini revolution.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

And we saw it manifest itself in different forms, from the Taliban to ISIS to a lot of what we face today. A lot of that was institutionalized in part of what split society between modernity and the religious beliefs. So you had that aspect that was very much the root cause of, I think, that frenzy, which you cannot fight. I mean, fighting a religious ideology is almost impossible, even though my grandfather and my father tried their best to, you know, attenuate that. But the sentiments at the time were very much driven by that. Interestingly enough, the left, the Marxist left, had their own agenda in terms of being anti-Western, anti this and all that. And they somehow happened to be in the same boat with the



Islamists. But the left was much more arguing about the progressive aspects of things, the liberalizing aspect of things.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

I'm talking about the Social Democrats, not necessarily the Marxists, because their agenda was quite clear. But at the end, it was really the religious part that prevailed. And that's not something you can easily fight, because it was sacrilegious to even say something negative about the faith. Today is completely different. But we had to experience all of that to be where we are today. At the time, it was almost impossible. So was it almost futile to resist? I think a lot of that goes back to the question you asked me earlier, or at least has been brought up many times, of if you were in my father's shoes, would you try to resist and then go down in history as somebody who tried to cling on to power by having to turn the guns on their own society, assuming that it would have changed things? Or was it doomed anyway, but instead he will be known in history as somebody who had blood of the people on his hands?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

So I think that's really something that, can you say it's avoidable or not? At the time, it seemed to be almost too late to do anything, because that was the frenzy. It was really hysteria. When you had college professors, teachers, who would say that they actually saw Khomeini's face in the moon, that's a so-called intellectual saying this. It's not an uneducated peasant saying something like that. Educated people were saying that. How can you rationalize with that kind of fervor or frenzy? You can't fight that. When people are willing to see that they actually saw somebody's face in the moon, what are you going to do? That's what we faced. That's really what we faced at the time.

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INTERVIEWER:

Instead of resisting turning guns on his own people, can you tell what decision he made instead, which launched you into this new chapter of your life?

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REZA PAHLAVI:



At the time where this issue was being considered, I'm talking about towards the end of 1978. The Guadeloupe Summit, which involved President Jimmy Carter, Prime Minister Callahan, Helmut Schmidt, who was the German chancellor, and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who was the French president. When they heard that my father is not going to fight back or repress, then they said, well, if the Shah is not willing to cling on to his position, we have no choice but to back the Khomeini revolution. So there were a lot of external factors that contributed to that as well. And the leading theory at the time was what they referred to later as the green belt theory, which was at least contemplated during the Carter administration, was by creating a religious belt, we can contain communism from penetrating and influencing the region.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

That was the mindset, that this would be an actual religious belt protecting the region from communist interference, namely from the Soviet Union at the time. Of course, that backfired, and there's too many details that we can get into, which is by itself an entire analysis. But that was the mentality back then, that, okay, the Shah is not going to stick to his guns, we have, therefore, to support the revolution from happening. And there was a tremendous amount of influence by telling the Iranian military and others not to intervene, to stay neutral, and allow for that revolution to actually take place. This is practically what happened. Of course, the first thing Khomeini did was to start decapitating the previous establishment by executing former ministers and military personnel. And that emboldened Saddam Hussein to take advantage of the situation and actually invade Iran, thinking that he can take advantage of that.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

And, you know, all of that was as a result of Khomeini in the first place. So a lot of dominoes started falling one after the other and took the whole region into turmoil ever since the revolution. So net -net, when you look at the consequences of that, it's not something that just happened to Iran and Iranians, but look at the entire region ever since, all the way to what we are facing today.

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INTERVIEWER:

One thing I think we're missing is a direct expression of what your father decided to do instead, which brought things to a conclusion.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

Well, he made the decision that I would have to voluntarily step aside and leave the country, hoping that at least he would give a last chance to his last prime minister, Shapul Bakhtiar, to try and bring some stability. But that obviously didn't work because, I mean, Bakhtiar would not have been anyone without having the king in a position to support. And Khomeini said, well, no, this is my chance to prevail, and basically, you know, took over with his revolutionary team, and the rest is history, literally speaking.

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INTERVIEWER:

As a 63 -year -old man having now about 45 more years of experience, what advice would you give to that 18 -year -old young man who was just entering into this period of, as you would describe it, trying to find their bearings?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

Well, I think that what makes you more capable of facing a challenge is confidence, and a confident individual thinks much less about the impossibility of a task. Of course, the more minds are together at it, the more likely it is to be addressed. But starting at the individual level, the first thing is to have confidence, and I think confidence comes as a result of, A, having a clear vision, understanding your own capabilities or potential to be able to do it, and thinking positively about things.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

Our culture has for a long time been laced into negative thoughts and lamentation, and I don't know, not the positive vibes that you have to have, a proactive, positive attitude, and that, I think, is something that has always been impeding as something that renders society kind of passive. It's also the way you deal in terms of hierarchy. I believe in a very simple premise that if you treat



people as children, they will become and act like children, but if you treat them as fully capable adults that are responsible, then they will start behaving as such and assume responsibilities. How do you convey that? How do you create that new culture, that new philosophy, that new mentality?

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REZA PAHLAVI:

It's a mentality at the end of the day, and that, I think, goes towards accepting the challenge, knowing that you can achieve that, feel confident about yourself, be given the opportunity to perform, because I'm not going to judge anyone in terms of whether or not they will be able to succeed. Who knows? I can only say you are given all the opportunities. It's up to you to show up to the plate or not, and I think it's all about that. One of the things that makes America such a great country is call yourself the land of opportunities. What does that mean? That means if you put up effort, sacrifice, work hard, you will succeed. You have that opportunity. Imagine a country that doesn't give you that first opportunity to begin with, which is what Iran is right now. People are deflated. People are cynical. People are depressed. On the other hand, if they say, imagine a different situation where we will have all that opportunities, and why not, then it's up to you.

01:13:04:00

INTERVIEWER:

So that 18-year-old young man, your advice to him is to be more confident. So I'm going to pretend to be that young man, but the situation does seem impossible. How am I supposed to be confident in this situation?

01:13:20:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

Well, we all know the barrier that keeps us from being in a position to have those opportunities. We have to overcome the barrier, which is this regime, a regime that deprives Iranians from all these opportunities. Hence why we are talking about a secular democratic system in which all these liberties, all these individual rights, human rights, every aspect that makes you as a citizen comfortable and confident and willing to put in your own sweat equity, because there's nothing holding you back. There's nothing censoring you. There's



nothing repressing you. There's no discrimination of any form, whether sexual, political, ethnic, religious, or what have you. In other words, the full-fledged package of all the rights and liberties that you're entitled. And I think this is the principle that we are all fighting for as secular democrats, vis-a-vis a religious dictatorship.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

We need to overcome this regime, because beyond that, these opportunities will then be in place. There will be a rule of law. There will be a system. There will be a constitution that guarantees your rights. But after all is done, ultimately, it's up to you, the individual. But if you believe that under a different set of circumstances, you believe that you can have these opportunities, that it will be no longer any form of discrimination, then it's your failure for not taking advantage of the opportunity. You can't blame the state. You can't blame the system. You have only yourselves to blame. So I start by saying, look, the whole challenge is for us to create an opportunity for all of us in that 85 million nation to have this opportunity. And the rest is up to us. But we need to get there first. But if you believe that it can be done, and if you believe that it should be done, then we need to put all our energy to making this happen. This is basically the road map. In fact, my strategy in my campaign is to say I want to move the needle from hope to belief.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

It's one thing to have hope, but we need to go beyond hope. We have to actually believe that it can be done. And that by itself, moving from hope to belief, means that you're not expecting anymore. You are proactively engaged in it. You need it as much as you need oxygen to breathe and stay alive. That's part of the entire path. And I'm trying to energize the people, the young people, the new generation. I say, look, I can't see no reason why you won't succeed, because I know you have all the potential. You are gifted. You are talented. You have ingenuity. You have all the capacity, whether you're a scientist or an engineer or a doctor or an artist. I know you have that. I can see that. I can see the sacrifices you are making every single day. I can see you brave the streets knowing that



you might go home, never go home and never see your family again and end up being tortured or executed. But you still are doing your part, because you know that at the end of the tunnel, we need to reach that light.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

So it's already in there. But they still need some more encouragement, knowing that the sacrifice is worth it at the end of the day. And we need to be able to do that together. Now, will you ever succeed in your lifetime? You don't know. But you have to believe that at some point the stars will align. And when they do align, that's where change happens. Eventually, the Berlin Wall comes down. Eventually, apartheid is ended in South Africa. Eventually, military dictatorships in Latin America come to an end. And so on and so forth. And this is how our world has evolved. People behind causes that they actually believed in, things that were no longer tolerable or acceptable, defeating fascism, defeating racism, defeating many of these things, it takes time. It takes effort. It takes sacrifice. It has its casualties.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

But do you give up on the concept just because you think it's almost unreachable? I mean, if you give up, might as well pack and go home, right? What are we doing, therefore? What's the whole purpose? But if you believe that the opportunities will come, but we have to be ready for it when they come. We have to be prepared for it. It's almost like training for the Olympics. How much sacrifice goes into these athletes that they put down that effort and that sacrifice to be at the best possible shape? Because when they get that chance to run that 100 -meter dash, that's their moment in time where they can win or not the medal, right? It's almost like being the backup quarterback. You have to be ready because you can be called. Okay, you're next. And millions of people are next. This is the generation that is going to inherit the country. What are they going to do with it?

01:18:19:00

INTERVIEWER:



And so many of them are at that age that you identified was the age when things seemed kind of overwhelming and impossible to you.

01:18:32:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

Well, it's normal. It's normal because the difference that is set between generations is the experience, is immaturity. I read this somewhere, this saying that I actually believe in a lot, and they say experience comes from mistakes. Wisdom comes from experience. So it's a learning curve. The more time goes by, the more experience you have, the more reflections you have. And I guess the younger generation, if they can find reason why they would trust someone, could be ultimately because it's not just a vision, but there's an experience behind it. There's something that maybe they went through that they're trying to convey to the next generation, that we are not so different in terms of the learning curve at different age. Circumstances do change. Of course, our environment is different.

01:19:32:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

We're talking about the generation of the Second World War and how life was around the planet, as opposed to now the beginning of the 21st century, how different it is, the difference in the last hundred years. Technology, AI, social media, I mean so many different aspects that didn't exist, but the root elements still remain the same. It's always the same process of one generation learning, acquiring more experience. This may sound cliché, but I really believe that nothing remains the same forever. Change is part of nature in general, laws of physics in the universe, constant change is occurring. So as it applies to the world and humanity and the fact that the reason we have evolved is in fact because of change rather than not, then eventually change will occur.

01:20:33:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

Now, as I said earlier, do we need to have the right circumstances and the stars aligned? Yes, we do. So what do you do in the meantime? As I said, when people are in a frenzy, when they are like mass hysteria, and which is really was the case in Iran, it was really mass hysteria in a way, you know, you have to just hold



your breath, wait for a while, say eventually this is going to settle down and now people say, okay, what the hell did we do? And that's in fact the response today. What the hell were you thinking? The kids today, the young generation blame their parents and say, what were you thinking? We are not responsible for the current circumstances. We have inherited this mess that you created so that young kid, as you were saying, that activist who has a friend who he lost in the protest and has been tortured or executed and all that, what motivation would he have? It's again the same adage that, look, we can't give up. We have to continue the fight.

01:21:33:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

And they have done their part. Sadly, I think the world has done very little, particularly democracies in this world who ought to be in the same value boats that we are. And the expectations from them is much greater than some other countries. And they end up net net losing much more as a consequence of what happened in the region. So why is it that they are not getting that extra help? Because what I'm trying to say is that Iranians, young Iranians in the last few years have gone well beyond and above the call of duty in terms of sacrifice, with no help in sight, with not the slightest amount of help, and still achieve this much in terms of resistance. Imagine, only imagine what they could actually do if they had the maximum support that they deserve towards that change.

01:22:30:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

Because our change is in the best interest, I believe, of the free world, if they look at the light. You no longer have to worry about terrorism. You don't have to worry anymore about nuclear threats. You don't have to worry about radicalization and regional instability, the economic impact that you're facing, the energy crisis, problems of immigration. I mean, so many things that are directly linked to the circumstances and situation in one country called Iran, which is the epicenter of this mess. And we're trying to change that. Why? To have the same ideas of freedom and liberty that you enjoy here in America or in France or some other Western democracy. And we'd like to have the same thing in our country. We are partners in this vision. What are you waiting for? Because



there's only one level and extent to which I can tell the fellow Iranians, look, hang in there, the cavalry eventually will arrive. But what if it doesn't? That I cannot answer.

01:23:30:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

That's where I turn to Western leaders and legislators and public opinion and say, your part in this is missing. Because all the other changes that have happened, at least in contemporary history, changes that came across mostly civil action, not by means of foreign intervention or military takeovers, but by various movement of protest and civil disobedience and political change, not by conflict and military means. Case in point solidarity in Poland with Lech Walesa, case in point South Africa, Nelson Mandela, the ANC and the negotiations to put an end to apartheid. There is a foreign component attached that made this situation prevail. There's no way the Soviet Union would have collapsed and the dissidents in that country eventually succeed had not been for some level of tacit support from the Western free world.

01:24:30:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

I think the same argument can be made about how change can happen in Iran. So it becomes much less possible, although still not impossible, without having adequate support from the outside. And that has always been my argument. We cannot depend on anybody else but ourselves to free our country. But it will be such less costly in terms of human life losses or the economic shock if we have much more support. And that's really the level of the equation. So to be absolutely honest and realistic, that's exactly what I tell my fellow compatriots, that we have to stand up and keep the resistance and fighting going. And eventually, probably the world will wisen up and see there's no point trying to negotiate or cut a deal with a regime that is repressing our country every day at this level.

01:25:33:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

That spends our country's resources not to the benefit of our own society but to advance their conflicts and their proxies and impacting the world in such a



negative way. And eventually, things will change. It will have to change. And if I hadn't enough experience in other cases around the world of seeing change eventually happen, maybe I would be telling you something completely different today, Brandon. I would say, you know, sometimes you just have to fold and, you know, step out.

01:26:06:00

INTERVIEWER:

If you were to script the next 20 years of your life and you could write your own story. And I'm going to challenge you here because, admirably, you always drift the personal questions you pivot back to Iran very quickly. So I'm going to challenge you, not script the next 20 years of Iran's life, but if you were to write the story of the next 20 years of your life and could choose anything, you weren't burdened by the expectations or the responsibilities, just how you, what would the story of the next 20 years of your life look like? Please be as specific as possible.

01:26:44:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

Well, you know, I love to travel, I love to explore. There are many places that I've traveled to in my life but there are many places that I haven't that are on my bucket list and I like to be able to do at some point when I still physically and mentally can't do it. So, you know, as far as having a life, literally having a life too, people need to remember that no matter what you do and what's expected, you're not operating in a vacuum, you're not a robot, you're not a computer that can just turn on, you know, you have to have a life as well. And that's what will be a fulfillment for me, to be able to have those opportunities, to see places that I wanted to see, to go on a photographic safari somewhere and, you know, take my photos and share it as my experience with the world and interact with more, discover more of our world in any sense.

01:27:43:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

That has always been one of my passions and interests and I am very much focused on environmental issues. I really believe in issues that affect the whole planet, including our region. So, you know, I'm always after soliciting the best



ideas of scientists and experts and see how we can encourage entrepreneurs who can help bring about all these pioneering technologies that can help us fight many issues that we have, from global warming to hunger to whatever it is that we have out there. It's really a balance between yourself and what you can enjoy in life, but also having more than of a purpose of not just self-fulfillment, but while you can have an impact, how much can you have impact in that sense. So, I think it's a little bit of both. I cannot be completely detached, but I cannot not have a life either and I don't have that much left to live. I live up to two-thirds of my life, you know, so what do you do with the last few years?

01:28:53:00

INTERVIEWER:

And the two-thirds that you've had so far has not been able to have a life outside of your role been something that's challenged you?

01:29:03:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

If I wanted to say, you know what, sayonara, I'm done. I can pursue my own life now. I'm no longer held in a position of expectation and I could have done that 44 years ago and say, you know, I'm just going to go and pursue a career and get into this or that and have a completely different life. But instead what I've done was to hold the fort in a manner of speaking, knowing that I cannot just be indifferent to what's happening in Iran. I think Iran is a country that deserves so much better and has so much more potential and eventually we could get there. So it became, by default, a life's mission. And this should not be just my concern, this should be every patriot's concern. But if you are in a position where you can make a big difference by having that impact, that, you know, influence.

01:30:06:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

That's the part that I recognized from the very beginning that I still have just because of who I am, just because of my name. And the more we have gone in time, the more this has become obvious. But I also learned in the process that in order to be able to support a cause, you also have to have a stable environment, you have to also have a structure around yourself. And, you know, the more you



go in time, the more it's important to see that what aspect of life itself is it that you allow yourselves to have. Because at first I had no life, I literally had no life. Now I have some life and I balance it. I balance it because I say in order to do what you expect me to do, I have to have a certain level of sanity which I cannot get without having a life. But I'm not just pursuing my own life and say I don't care about the rest of you.

01:31:07:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

So it's a little bit of both. And if you don't have that, then you can't do anything for others. I was brought up in a way to appreciate nature a lot. So I was very connected to nature from childhood. I remember when we had a channel in Iran that was broadcasting in color because the first channel was in black and white. We still didn't have color television in the early 70s. But finally we had one network that was broadcasting in color. And I was watching these various documentaries by Jacques Cousteau, the famous French, you know, pioneer in the field of scuba diving and what have you. And from the very beginning, I was very much interested into marine life. And, you know, later on, you know, I'm a scuba diver among other things. So I do a lot of underwater photography, combining photography and scuba diving and things like that. And I was fascinated by that sense of research.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

So I always thought that if one day I had the means to have the continuation of the Calypso, which was Jacques Cousteau's, you know, research vessel, to have something like that, to have a huge boat with the latest technological means on it and platforms and host world scientists to go on various expeditions, you know, to explore and assess the situation and the healthiness of the ecosystem, whether it's marine or not. That is really something that I've always been passionate of being able to do. And, you know, that I think is something that is helpful to the whole planet and will be very applicable in the case of Iran in the future. I'd like to be able to do something like that then. And, you know, let others do the governance and help them give them my advice. But, you know, I'm not at all interested in power or authority. On the contrary, I think, you



know, it's you can do much more without being necessarily cornered into that position. Anyway, that's just a distant vision. But as I said, the focus right now is to breach that wall and overcome this challenge. But I also need to get my batteries recharged. And that's how I recharge my batteries.

01:33:29:00

INTERVIEWER:

Say that the pace of events in Iran has slowed down. But what has changed recently that has allowed you to get that separation? Because if anything, the pace of events in Iran and people wanting to know your thoughts and your plans have only increased. Yet you identify the previous period as the period where you were unable to have any sort of separation from the role of expectation, as you call it.

01:34:00:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

Well, yeah, look, people might have a certain expectation or assumption about the role you would have. Well, I don't let people define my role. I'm the only one who will define my role. And there are many things I'm willing to do, as there are many things that I'm not willing to do. And I can explain it and argue the reasons for it. But this is not the time to jump the gun or put the horse before the carriage before the horse. We have to first overcome this obstacle. That's really my focus and only focus, not what will happen in the future, what my role may be in the future. I'm not thinking in those terms. I'm just thinking of the only function and role that I see myself play today is to help usher that transition from where we are today to that future we're describing.

01:35:04:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

Let's first do that. And if we start thinking of too many things, literally putting the carriage before the horse, that's my only focus. And that requires a certain discipline of staying in the lane and describe the objective very clearly. But understanding, of course, that this is where all the opportunities will start occurring down the line. But until we breach that wall, we're stuck behind it. We need to first get rid of this wall. And that's really what should be our collective preoccupation. So you cannot reminisce because what's done is done. All we can



focus on is what's our path to the future. And this is what I think should be the central focus. Can we put a timeline on it? Impossible. You don't know. You can't predict. It could be months. It could be years. Who knows? But it goes back to that sense of readiness and some of those alignment and factors that help expedite, as opposed to impede, change from occurring.

01:36:07:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

Some of it is domestic. It's or reacts to it. It's a combination of these ingredients that will determine how soon or not we'll be able to breach that wall. How would you say you're different than people perceive you? When we say people, it's not a collective judgment from people. Different people have different reactions. Different generations look at you differently. I would say the younger generation that connects with me at a totally different level than previous generations, probably get it better what it is that I'm thinking and I'm projecting as part of my vision. It's almost like rebels with a cause.

01:37:07:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

It's a rebellion. What happened, especially after Mahsa Amini, who triggered a new wave of protests in Iran, almost at the level of a revolution beyond protest. It's a rebellion. It's an ongoing rebellion that needs to ultimately succeed. It's all a matter of managing this momentum and keeping it going because that's the only way we're going to defeat our enemies, which is the regime basically standing in front of us with the shameless use of repression to the extent that they can survive. Very different than my father saying, you know what, I don't want blood on my hands. Okay, I leave and be it as it may, if that's what people want, then that's what they get. And so today people say, you know...

01:38:03:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

They see that what I'm trying to do is to be a catalyst, more of an agent for change, to help them leading this process to its conclusion. And the younger people understand that this is not like, okay, we sit back and some saber-brattling, white horse riding savior and hero will come and save us, which is, I think, too unrealistic of an idea, as opposed to somebody who says, you know, a



modern thinking, a different future, all about the opportunities. It's a collective action. It's not just a one person thing. They get it better. They understand it better. This is something that they will actually prefer to have, not pivoting back to, okay, we're just replacing one authority with the other. I don't think that's where they are. And the younger the generation, the more in line they are with that kind of thinking.

01:39:05:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

So I had to fight that mentality for many years. I think my job is actually easier now to convey this message because the recipient of this message is much more in line and in tune, understanding the reason behind it and the vision for it. So, in fact, I think that the younger people today are far more in line with my thinking than any of the preceding generation. And that's a very positive thing. That's what gives me the hope that I need to have to continue.

01:39:40:00

INTERVIEWER:

What do you think your responsibility is?

01:39:44:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

Synchronicity is very important in these kind of movements. In other words, you cannot be ahead of the wave or chasing a wave. You have to be right on that frequency and, you know, synchronicity of action. So while, as I said earlier, it is very difficult to put a timeline on anything, but it's important to be in sync with where people are. And when you're talking about the streets of Iran as being the ultimate deciding battleground, not some academic bubble outside or over-intellectualized narratives of change, but something that the average man on the street is facing on a day-to-day basis, the economic hardship and the challenges and the deceptions, but at the same time, the resistance, the protests and all that.

01:40:46:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

You really have to be in sync with that because if part of leadership is to call people to action, it has to be based on the reality of the circumstances at that



moment. In other words, you can ask them beyond certain capabilities while trying to maximize and optimize the potential of an action at that moment in time as part of the overall strategy. And so I think it's important that a lot of what I do is to constantly monitor and be updated as to all the daily news of what's happening within Iran in the four corners. It's not just a general strategy, but also understanding the situation that people are confronting every day because to be able to find the best way of achieving something.

01:41:47:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

And again, it's not just an outside prescription. It's based on a lot of give and take and dialog and conversation and collective wisdom. But it's really to be in sync because these are very critical moments. You cannot talk about an issue that is far further down the line when the immediate issue may be one thing, but in order to ultimately solve the problem, we know that none of these issues will be resolved, so we're back to the general movement again. So how do you incentivize people while showing sensibility to an understanding of their plight, but at the same time say, given, as it may, this is what we really need to do now, and bring that collective action based on that exchange. So we have to stay real and true to the circumstances and operate with what's there as opposed to some imagination. And that's, I challenge.

01:42:49:00

INTERVIEWER:

What is it that, if you have done, that at the end of your life you will view it as having been enough?

01:43:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

You know, you always wish you could do more, but you're only limited in the means within which you can operate or do things. But I think that when people respond or react to something you do, whether it's a trip you take to a country or a speech that you give in one event or advocate their points in a legislative body or what have you, it's a combination of all of the above that makes you have a track record. And I think in 44 years my track record has been proven to many Iranians of at least being their voice as much as I could to be their



representative on the world stage and convey their aspiration and expectations to the outside world. But also, what do I tell them?

01:44:00:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

How do I give them a sense that, well, you know, as much as we face challenges and difficulties, but there are also a lot of creativity and dedicated people who have put a lot of time and effort to try to help this cause, both inside and outside of Iran. So, you know, as I said earlier, this is not just one man's journey. I never think that the onus should be just on me. I know I have a responsibility, but it shouldn't be only on my back. It's collective. And in that sense, you know, we have to all be there for one another as opposed to, okay, you wait and deliver it on a civil platter. It's not going to happen that way. Of course not. So that by itself means that the expectation is different for people who are more realists when they understand all the challenges. They understand that at some time we need to have external factors to contribute to that. And, you know, that's exactly why we need to make sure that the world understands where we are as a society, where we want to go as a society, and why is it in their interest to be involved as opposed to be just observers.

01:45:22:00

INTERVIEWER:

If you were to describe as simply as possible what you mean by holding the fort, what does that mean to you?

01:45:28:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

For me, holding the fort is holding to our identity as a nation, our identity as a culture, our identity as our sense of what it means to be an Iranian, if that makes any sense. And while we had to face a system that from the very beginning was anti -Iranian, anti -nation, they refer to *omat* as opposed to *melat*. *Melat* means nation. *Omat* means the believers of that faith. It has nothing to do with borders or boundaries. And everything the regime was doing from the beginning was to go against every aspect of our celebration of Nowruz, our New Year, or various traditional, you know, everything that has to do with our national identity.

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REZA PAHLAVI:

So they were the antithesis to our sense of identity. I tried to keep at least that alive, that torch, which I'm now passing on to today's generation. I say, you know, we may not have been able to free ourselves yet, but at least our identity is intact despite the regime's attempt to destroy it. In fact, it has become even more prevalent in the last few years, the way people will gather at Cyrus the Great's tomb to celebrate all those aspects that, you know, people think that human rights is really a Western creation. It was coined first by Cyrus the Great 25 centuries ago when he liberated the slaves in Babylon. He helped rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. He brought in a state of affairs where people were free to practice their religions without any form of discrimination and what have you.

01:47:32:00

REZA PAHLAVI:

This was done 25 centuries ago in a land called Persia, now modern Iran, and that's what was represented in our sense of identity. And we keep that torch alive because this is a regime that is discriminatory, treats women as second-class citizens, discriminates against other religions, whether you're a Baha'i or a Jew or what have you, or if you're a member of the LGBTQ community, anything that goes against values that were part of our culture centuries before, the forefathers of the American Constitution came and wrote the Bill of Rights and the Declaration of Independence. And by the way, a lot of it influenced by Cyrus the Great. Thomas Jefferson has a lot of the aspects built into this value system based on that. So, you know, that's really what Iran is or should be as opposed to what it's known to be now under this regime. And this is the light that you keep alive and say, let's not forget who we were and where we could be. And this is not Iran. What you see today is not us. That's not us. Try to keep that alive.

01:48:42:00

INTERVIEWER:

I think that was a really nice ending point.

END TC: 01:49:12