

Political Legitimacy and the Reproduction of Power in Contemporary Iran



by Dr. Basir Kamjou

Abstract

This article adopts an analytical, ethics-based approach grounded in historical data to examine the position of Reza Pahlavi in the political future of Iran. By reviewing the remnants of the Pahlavi monarchy and the recent political behaviors of the former king's son, it explores the possibility of his legitimacy, efficacy, and popular acceptance. The findings indicate that the reproduction of power through hereditary forms, without popular backing, does not align with the needs of modern Iranian society.^{^1}

Introduction

Iran, one of the world's ancient civilizations, has experienced various regimes in recent centuries, each leaving deep impacts on the country's political and social fabric. Among these, the Pahlavi dynasty marked a significant transformation that culminated in the 1979 revolution.^{^1} More than four decades after the fall of the monarchy, debates about Reza Pahlavi's potential return to the Iranian political scene have resurfaced. Is such a return possible, desirable, or legitimate?

Historical Review and Critique of the Pahlavi Monarchy

Dependence on Foreign Powers

Reza Shah rose to power with British support,^{^2} and his son Mohammad Reza remained on the throne largely due to foreign interventions, notably during the 1953 coup.^{^3}

Suppression of Freedoms and Institutional Dismantling

During the Pahlavi era, independent parties, free media, and civil society faced severe repression. The legacy of SAVAK, censorship, and political imprisonment remains a painful chapter in the nation's memory.^{^2,^4}

Widespread Discontent and Social Change

The 1979 popular movement was not sudden but the outcome of years of authoritarianism, inefficiency, and accumulated dissatisfaction with the monarchy.^{^1,^5}

Critical Examination of Reza Pahlavi's Political Persona

Detachment from Iranian Social Realities

Having spent much of his life in the West, Reza Pahlavi has lacked direct involvement in Iran's on-the-ground political developments.^{^5,^6}

Possible Dependence on Foreign Support

The orientation of some of his associates towards foreign governments and institutions raises concerns about reliance on external actors.^{^6}

Lack of a Comprehensive and Transparent Program

While many political forces have presented clear and practical plans, Reza Pahlavi has yet to propose a concrete and tangible political strategy with broad popular appeal.^{^6}

Requirements for National Leadership in Contemporary Iran

- **Legitimacy must arise from the people, not from bloodlines or family names**^{^3}
- **Avoidance of any reliance on foreign powers to gain authority**^{^4}
- **Honesty, transparency, and accountability toward the populace**
- **Deep understanding of people's hardships and active participation in genuine civil struggles**
- **Possession of a practical program rather than emotional slogans or nostalgic rhetoric**^{^5}

Conclusion

Returning to outdated and ineffective governance structures, even with new faces or slogans, does not address the needs and aspirations of today's Iranian generation. A society that has experienced the heavy costs of the past deserves a brighter, fairer, and more participatory future — one built on collective rationality, transparency, social justice, and genuine popular engagement.

In this process, everyone has the right to participate in public discourse and present their ideas, including Reza Pahlavi. However, national leadership requires legitimacy rooted in lived experience, ongoing interaction with the people, and proven ability to empathize and act effectively. The Iranian people seek leaders who deeply understand their sufferings and hopes — not those who have only watched from afar.^{^5,^6}

References

1. Abrahamian, Ervand. *Iran Between Two Revolutions*. Tehran: Nashr-e Ney, 2019.
 2. Milani, Abbas. *The Enigma of Hoveyda*. Tehran: Nashr-e Ney, 2011.
 3. Katouzian, Mohammad Ali. *State and Society in Iran*. Tehran: Nashr-e Markaz, 2008.
 4. Documents related to the 1953 coup and developments in the 1950s and 1970s, especially Iran's National Archive and U.S. government releases.
 5. Dabashi, Hamid. *Iran: Between Tradition and Modernity*. Translated by Rahman Afshari, Tehran: Nashr-e Ney, 2017.
 6. Official statements and interviews of Reza Pahlavi, available at <https://www.rezapahlavi.org>
-