

REZA PAHLAVI'S OPENING STATEMENT  
THE NIXON CENTER  
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Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests, good afternoon.

Let me thank Dr. Kemp and the Nixon Center for this invitation and his kind introduction. It is always good to be back here and among friends.

Before getting into a more detailed give-and-take session with you, allow me to frame today's US-Iran predicament from the perspective of one who has had a daily front-row seat into my country's domestic theatre, and whose primary concern is the individual fate of 70 million Iranians whose legitimate aspiration for liberty, freedom and human rights cannot be discounted under any circumstance.

In my view, we should first and foremost reflect on the big picture:

First, the clerical regime's ultimate goal,

Second, my compatriots national aspirations, and

Third, the free world long term interests.

On the first point, we need to remember that the regime's *raison d'être* is to establish a modern day Shiite Caliphate, thereby dominating the region and eventually broaden its reach beyond.

On the second point, which is my central mission in life, we seek a secular alternative to the world's only existing modern day theocracy.

On the third point, the long-standing rhetoric of western capitals has been support for regional peace and stability. In practice, however, inconsistent policies have come into conflict with such desires.

Let us first take a look at the domestic picture from the prism of the citizens of Iran:

The regime's total disregard for the people's livelihood can be summarized in economic decay, corruption, mismanagement, repression – collectively leading to continued dwindling of the people's living standards. My compatriots find it unacceptable that our national resources which could have easily supported their hopes and aspirations for social and economic prosperity have been squandered by the clerical regime, in pursuit and support of destructive adventurism beyond our borders.

Iranians today seek a solution beyond the clerical establishment. Visible and unwavering solidarity by the international community will strengthened this quest for democracy, unshackling the nation from militancy and rule by "Divine Law".

In my view, however, the western world has yet to comprehend the simple yet fundamental fact that this regime cannot possibly coexist with it! The regime's ideology is based on the countering and defeat of western ideologies and core values. Its vehement

animosity against the West, and the US in particular, is not just a matter of taste or culture; it is at the core of the regime's philosophy as to how the world ought to be governed.

Far too often we have seen this fundamental flaw in expecting the regime to reason on the same basis of rationality and logic observed in the West. It is not surprising therefore to witness a lack of breakthrough throughout these years. In short, the regime has cleverly utilized the west's perceived naïveté towards its own interests and goals. It has bought time, inched closer to the nuclear umbrella, with the goal to equalize the balance of power, hence blackmailing the region and the international community with a fait accompli.

In recent times, absent a coherent policy towards the clerical regime, and in a primarily reactive mode, the response to the various challenges posed by the regime has generally revolved around such options as diplomatic isolation, economic sanctions, casual insinuation of "regime change", or even the sinister military option.

Today, Washington is abuzz with a new term: Engagement. As attractive as it may seem, the question remains, to what end and at what expense? Are the people of Iran left out of this equation?

We submit that while engagement in fact may be an important diplomatic tool, any dialogue with the clerical regime must not exclude the legitimate aspirations of the Iranian people, namely liberty and human rights. If so, the west will only succeed in alienating the Iranian street, which by all measures has consistently rejected the regime's venomous anti-western orientation since its inception.

With the new theme of hopefulness emanating from Washington, it is hard to imagine that the new president, elected on the platform of people power, could remain indifferent to the plight of 70 million Iranians who demand the same.

Engagement is only acceptable if it is based on a dual track approach that includes the Iranian people in parallel to the ruling clerics.

Engagement with my compatriots should start by using every opportunity to voice and recognize pro-democracy activists and movements within Iran and the condemning of human rights abuses perpetrated by the regime.

We believe that a democratic Iran will guarantee a popularly elected secular system of government with checks and balances and a clear delineation of power. This will ensure a vibrant civil society wherein people of different ethnicities, religious, socio-economic groups, and political persuasions will coexist peacefully while rebuilding their homeland. Iranians are a gifted people with a great civilization. It is time to allow them to freely choose for themselves the political system of their choice, and towards that goal, all Iranians and non-Iranians who share this end must unite.