



## Foreign Involvement in Iran's Opposition Is Risky and Unwarranted

by Arvin Khoshnood on March 11, 2025

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**Efforts to manufacture an Iranian opposition abroad risk undermining the genuine grassroots movement already established inside and outside Iran. History has demonstrated that foreign-imposed opposition in Iraq and Afghanistan led to instability and failed states. The only viable path for a democratic and stable Iran lies in supporting the Iranian people through maximum pressure on the Islamic regime and recognizing Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi as the legitimate leader of the transition. Any other alternative – whether appeasement of the Islamic Republic of Iran or support for war and extremist groups – would be disastrous for Iran and the broader international community.**

### **The Independence of the National Movement**

For over four decades, Iranians have built a strong, cohesive, and independent national movement resisting the Islamic Republic of Iran. This movement is not a foreign construct, but an organic force deeply embedded in the historical, cultural, and political fabric of Iranian society. Its followers are united around the leadership of Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi, who has consistently championed democracy, secularism, human rights, and Iran's territorial integrity. Despite this, some foreign organizations and think tanks have sought to engineer an opposition in ways that contradict the will of the Iranian people.

United Against Nuclear Iran (UANI) has [recently proposed](#) gathering Iranian conservative forces to build a unified opposition. However, UANI has ties to groups like the Marxist-Islamist terrorist organization [Mojahedin-e Khalq](#) (MEK) and separatist factions that advocate for the disintegration of Iran, an agenda fundamentally at odds with the aspirations of Iranians. These two factions may position themselves as opposition to the Islamic regime, but they are also enemies of the Iranian nation.

Moreover, any attempt to impose a foreign-designed opposition structure on Iran disregards the fundamental principle of self-determination. The Iranian people alone must decide their leadership and the future of their country. A manufactured opposition, particularly one that includes groups despised by Iranians, would only deepen fractures within the anti-regime movement and weaken the struggle against the Islamic regime. Instead of uniting the opposition, such efforts risk creating further discord, ultimately serving the interests of the regime rather than those fighting to overthrow it.

### **Lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan**

The history of U.S. intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan serves as a cautionary tale. In Iraq, the U.S.

government supported the Iraqi National Congress (INC), led by [Ahmed Chalabi](#), as a key opposition force against Saddam Hussein. However, the INC had little genuine support among Iraqis and failed to establish legitimacy after Saddam's fall. The result was political chaos, sectarian violence, and the eventual rise of ISIS. Similarly, in Afghanistan, the U.S. and the Islamic Republic of Iran [impeded](#) the potential return of Zahir Shah, the former Afghan king, who was widely respected and could have played a stabilizing role. Instead, an externally engineered political opposition was imposed, leading to decades of instability and, ultimately, the Taliban's resurgence.

These failures highlight the dangers of imposing leadership structures on nations with complex political, social, and historical dynamics. Iranians do not want their country to become another Iraq or Afghanistan. They have already built their opposition organically and reject any attempt by foreign powers and organizations to dictate their political future.

### **How the International Community Can Support Iranians**

Rather than attempting to manufacture an opposition that includes terrorists and enemies of Iran, foreign governments and institutions should support the Iranian nation in four concrete ways.

First, they should apply maximum pressure on the Islamic regime. The Islamic Republic of Iran relies on repression and economic resources to maintain its grip on power. Economic sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and legal actions against the regime's operatives abroad weaken its ability to suppress the Iranian people. Strengthening sanctions enforcement and cutting off the regime's financial networks will accelerate its downfall.

Second, the international community should support the Iranian people's fight for democracy and secularism by providing them with means of communication that can be used when the Islamic regime shuts down the internet. Ensuring uninterrupted communication will be crucial during critical moments in the revolutionary struggle.

Third, foreign actors must stop legitimizing Iran's enemies, including terrorist organizations such as MEK and separatist groups that seek to disintegrate the country. Any form of support or engagement with these factions undermines the Iranian people's struggle for a unified, democratic Iran.

Finally, and most importantly, the world must recognize Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi as the true leader of the Iranian nation. The strongest opposition movement, the patriotic movement, has already united around Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi. Acknowledging his leadership during the revolutionary and transition period will provide clarity and legitimacy to the movement. Supporting an already trusted and respected figure ensures stability during and after the fall of the Islamic regime.

### **The Munich Convergence Summit**

One of the most significant steps toward opposition unity was the [Munich Convergence Summit](#) in February 2025. Called by Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi, this gathering brought together tens of Iranian opposition organizations, including political parties, associations, and think tanks from all around the world. Both monarchists and republicans participated, agreeing on 12 fundamental principles, including democracy, secularism, human rights, and Iran's territorial integrity. Notably, these groups recognized Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi's leadership during the revolutionary and transition period. His ability to unify diverse opposition organizations demonstrates his legitimacy as the leader of the Iranian people. This organic convergence of Iranian political forces stands in stark contrast to foreign-engineered alternatives that have repeatedly failed elsewhere.

### **Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi as the Only Viable Leader**

Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi is not just the most popular opposition figure, he is the only credible alternative to the Islamic regime. His leadership is grounded in his educational, military, and political background, as well as his lifelong commitment to democracy and human rights.

Trained as a fighter pilot at the U.S. Air Force Training Program, [Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi](#) was preparing to serve his country before the 1979 revolution. His military training instilled in him a strong sense of duty and leadership. During the Iran-Iraq War, when [MEK](#) supported Saddam Hussein against Iran, the Crown Prince demonstrated his patriotism by offering to defend Iran as a fighter pilot, an offer rejected by the Islamic regime. Furthermore, he holds a degree in Political Science from the University of Southern California and is well-versed in research on social movements and civil resistance. As a strong advocate of non-violent action, he has consistently promoted peaceful means to overthrow the Islamic regime.

For 45 years, Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi has remained unwavering in his commitment to a secular, democratic Iran based on human rights. Unlike opportunistic figures who shift their political stances, his steadfastness has earned him the trust of millions of Iranians. Independent surveys (see [GAMAAN](#) and [erf.i](#)) consistently show that he enjoys the most support among Iranians inside and outside the country. No other opposition figure comes close. In contrast, the self-proclaimed "president" of MEK, Maryam Rajavi, consistently ranks at the bottom with no support among Iranians.

### **The MEK and Separatists as a Dangerous Threat**

Despite their lack of support among Iranians, the MEK and separatist groups continue to receive backing from certain American politicians and think tanks like UANI. Often, the supporters of MEK are warmongers such as John Bolton and the late Joseph Lieberman.

The [MEK](#) is a Marxist-Islamist cult with a long record of violence against both Iranians and Americans. It supported the 1979 takeover of the U.S. embassy in Iran, attempted to block the release of American hostages, and later allied with Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War, fighting against Iranian soldiers. As a result, the MEK is not only rejected but despised by the Iranian people.

Separatism poses an equally [dangerous threat](#). Supporting factions that seek to disintegrate Iran would trigger a catastrophic chain reaction, including Islamism, terrorism, organized crime, mass displacement, and deeper regional conflict. A fragmented Iran would pose an enormous security risk, especially to Europe, which would face more terrorism, an influx of refugees, illicit drug trafficking, and violent instability close to its borders.

Both the MEK and separatists advocate for war against Iran, a disaster that would primarily harm the Iranian people, destroy critical infrastructure, and impede the country's future development.

### **Supporting the Iranian People, Not Foreign Proxies**

Neither war nor appeasement of the Islamic Republic of Iran will lead to a democratic and stable Iran. The only way forward is to support the Iranian people through maximum pressure on the regime and recognize Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi as the legitimate leader of Iran during the revolutionary and transition period. The international community must stand firmly with the Iranian people, not as patrons, but as equal partners in fostering peace and prosperity.

### **Arvin Khoshnood**

Arvin Khoshnood has published numerous research articles, reports and policy analyses related to Iran's domestic, foreign and security policies, Chinese security interests in the Middle East and hydropolitics in the Jordan River basin. He is frequently commenting on Iranian politics in the media and advise national and international policy makers, researchers and journalists on matters pertaining to Iran and the Middle East. Khoshnood holds degrees in political science, human geography and intelligence analysis from Lund University, Sweden.