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## **Pahlavi's Hope for a Better Iran** **Engagement with the right movement.**

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Reza Pahlavi learned an important lesson from Vaclav Havel: The Cold War opposition only thought they might be successful when Ronald Reagan called Russia an evil empire and triumphantly commanded Mr. Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin Wall. Pahlavi hopes Barack Obama speaks as definitively against to the Iranian regime -- he eagerly waits for the president of the United States to say, "Mr. Khomeini, tear down this wall!"

Pahlavi first left his native country of Iran in 1978, when he came to the United States. So he was abroad when political activists took to the streets of Tehran, Isfahan, and every other major Iranian city to protest their "lack of political freedoms" under the Shah. Their grievances with the monarchy hit a fever pitch in the late fall and early winter of 1978, after the Shah imposed martial law and his security forces opened fire on the protesters.

But Pahlavi is not just an ordinary Iranian émigré, he was -- or still is, depending on who you ask -- the heir to the throne of Iran. And he has been living in exile for the last thirty years in Morocco, Egypt and, now, the United States.

In January 1979, still in the U.S., Pahlavi watched the events unravel in his native country: His father, the Shah of Iran, and his mother, the empress, were forced to flee, clearing the field for Ayatollah Khomeini to seize power. But the Iranian revolutionaries who rallied behind Khomeini naively expected the ayatollah to retire to the holy city of Qom and merely "be a figurehead," while a secular leader ruled Iran. (Pahlavi quickly notes that the Carter administration made the same miscalculation.) But religion--more precisely, the religion of the ayatollah--soon replaced the monarchy's place in Iranian society, and many on the streets chanted "allah akbar [God is great]."

Today, a different slogan is ruling the streets of Iran, with Iranians trampling pictures of Khomeini and chanting "death to the dictator." Still, a Jimmy Carter-esque foreign policy persists in Washington. Pahlavi, who claims to have devoted the past thirty years of his life to supporting the freedom movement in Iran, makes this point: "The latest slogans in

Iran say 'Obama, Obama are you with them or with us.' What does that really mean? It means we expect more solidarity and support." Pahlavi asks, "Why do you think the demonstrators on the streets, at the risk of their own lives and limbs, are holding signs in English. It's not to practice their English, as one of our human rights activists here has been saying. This is obviously meant for outside world, particularly the United States."

But while the Iranians "are looking to the outside world for...moral support," Obama continues to indulge the theocratic regime in Tehran. Pahlavi's hope rests his hopes for a better future for Iran on dissidents within the nation: "The regime will ultimately collapse under domestic pressure." He remains optimistic about the future of Iran. The former crown prince of Iran sees the Iranian people as having traveled a tough road for thirty years—many of them living as émigrés in the Western world or elsewhere, with others still residing in Iran under a government that they hope will collapse. Many Iranians today who are distressed about the direction the revolution took their country are now prepared to embrace freedom, pluralism, and self-determination, even at the risk of their own lives.

Pahlavi adds one caveat about regime change: He is fundamentally opposed to regime change prompted by foreign governments, saying that anything other than internally induced change would not be legitimate. But does this mean that the outside world should not support the Iranians? "Of course they can be supported! I mean, for God's sake, from Solidarity in Poland to the ANC in South Africa...there was a great degree of support. But *they* [the Poles and South Africans] did it. It was not some foreign country doing it."

Whether Obama will resist the temptation to repeat the Carter administration's hand-wringing and seize the opportunity, as Reagan did, to support an oppressed people, and allow support democratic forces in a death struggle with tyranny, is a question whose answer has become painfully obvious in recent months. But it's not too late to change course: it would simply take a policy of engagement—engagement with the democratic forces of Iran.