

# Strategic Framework for U.S. Policy on Iran: Supporting Regime Change, Engaging Viable Alternative, and Facilitating Transition

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## Executive Summary:

The Islamic Republic of Iran is grappling with an unprecedented convergence of domestic and regional crises. As demonstrated by several nationwide uprisings in recent years, the regime's socio-economic repression and economic mismanagement have inflamed the Iranian peoples' rejection of the ruling mullahs. Moreover, the rapid collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria, which was propped up through significant financial and material investment by Tehran and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards' Quds Force, has dealt a severe blow to Iran's regional influence. The Assad regime's collapse both undermines Tehran's ability to project power in the Levant and disrupts its broader strategy of maintaining regional hegemony through a network of proxies across the Middle East. Magnifying these strategic losses is the elimination of key Iranian proxy leaders, such as those in Hezbollah and Hamas, which has further eroded Tehran's clout and revealed the vulnerabilities of its network of military alliances and proxies.

Domestically, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, faces a dire succession crisis, with no clear or stable path to guarantee continuity of power. This uncertainty, compounded by growing internal discontent fueled by economic collapse and widespread unrest, has left his regime increasingly paralyzed and without a viable path forward. Khamenei's inability to address these internal and external challenges highlights the inherent weaknesses of the theocratic government nearing collapse. This unique convergence of factors—internal unrest, regional isolation, and leadership instability—has pushed the regime to its dying breath.

The pressing question for the United States is: **What should its policy on Iran be, given these circumstances?** The time is ripe for a strategic recalibration of U.S. policy toward Iran. Broad support in the US Congress and across Europe for a democratic Iranian republic as outlined by Mrs. Maryam Rajavi's 10-point-plan, as well as the failure of past strategies (including containment, diplomatic engagements, nuclear negotiations, and appeasement) demand a more proactive and transformative approach to U.S. policy towards Iran.

A more dynamic and proactive framework is needed—one that not only aligns with the aspirations of the Iranian people to change the regime but also capitalizes on its vulnerabilities. This moment represents a convergence of factors, including mounting internal discontent, economic collapse, and crumbling regional hegemony and alliances, which provide a unique opportunity to support an Iranian regime change. Khamenei's leadership is fraught with challenges, and the rapid fall of Bashar al-Assad in Syria serves as a cautionary tale of how swiftly regimes can crumble under pressure.

The new strategic framework must decisively move beyond outdated strategies, biases and hesitancy, embracing a robust approach to supporting organized opposition movement against Tehran's regime. Beyond Maximum Pressure policy, the U.S. must formally engage with credible groups that present a clear roadmap for regime change and credible platform for guiding the transitional period following the regime's collapse. A critical first step would be for the U.S. to recognize and politically support the Iranian people and their organized resistance's struggle for complete regime change. To do so, it must end perpetual engagement with the decaying regime in Iran and formally recognize the **National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI)**, a functioning 500

plus member parliament in exile representing the tapestry of Iran’s rich cultural, ethnic, religious, and political landscape. We believe NCRI’s international recognition, independence, and 42 years-long record of opposing single-party dictatorship inside Iran, make it a key player in this transformative effort. The U.S. can help ensure stability in a post-Khamenei-Iran by taking a proactive approach, toiling to understand its roadmap for regime change as well as its transitional plan to a democratic republic free of monarchy and theocracy.

Additionally, the U.S. must strengthen international coalitions to diplomatically isolate Tehran. This approach would include rallying European and Middle Eastern allies to adopt unified sanctions, pressure campaigns, and public support for the Iranian people and their resistance movement. By doing so, the United States would not only align its actions with democratic values but also lay the groundwork for long-term peace and stability in the Middle East. This recalibrated U.S. policy would signal to the Iranian people and the global community that the United States is fully committed to their struggle for freedom, ensuring that this moment of opportunity does not go to waste.

The regime in Tehran is collapsing under the weight of its internal contradictions and external challenges. With each passing day, the regime’s grip on power weakens, signaling that its collapse is not a matter of if, but when. To develop a solid and viable US policy on Iran, it is imperative to recognize those who are truly fighting to replace the regime in Tehran. The parallels between Assad’s fall and Khamenei’s current predicament are difficult to ignore. Just as Assad faced a population demanding change, Khamenei confronts a society united in rejecting his theocratic rule. The lesson from Syria serves as a warning that sustained pressure—both internal and external—can erode even the most entrenched regimes, and Iran will not be an exception. Recognizing Iranian fighters for freedom ensures that U.S. strategy is rooted in reality and supports a credible pathway to systemic transformation in the region.

By aligning with the aspirations of the Iranian people and preparing for the challenges of a transitional period, the U.S. can help promote a stable and democratic Iran, contributing to long-term peace and security in the region.

Our 2025 policy paper explores the key conditions necessary for such a change. The paper calls for the preparedness of Washington to embrace the Iranian regime change and provides a strategic policy framework that extends beyond the immediate concerns of the nuclear threat and counterterrorism efforts associated with the current regime. Our goal is to provide a roadmap for U.S. policymakers that is actionable and factually grounded.

## Introduction

Iran’s current crisis extends far beyond economic hardships and repression—it reflects a deep and fundamental conflict between the Iranian people and the regime over the nature of governance itself. The regime’s foundation on the principle of *velayat-e-faqih* (guardianship of the Ayatollah), which grants absolute power to the Supreme Leader, stands in direct opposition to the people’s aspirations for democracy and self-determination. This rejection is not limited to the current regime; it reflects a broader repudiation of dictatorship in all its forms, including the monarchy of the Shah that was

overthrown in the 1979 revolution. The Iranian people are not rejecting the ideals of that revolution, which were rooted in a desire for freedom, justice, and equality. Instead, they are rejecting how those ideals were hijacked by the Ayatollahs to impose a theocratic dictatorship that betrayed the revolution's promises.

This political and ideological chasm between the regime and the people is the driving force behind Iran's widespread unrest. Protests across the country consistently challenge the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic, with slogans targeting the *velayat-e-faqih* system and rejecting both the current regime and any return to the monarchy. This deep-rooted conflict highlights the regime's vulnerability and the people's unwavering demand for systemic change. Regionally, Tehran's diminishing influence—evident in setbacks in **Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq** and **Gaza**—further weakens its standing, presenting a strategic opportunity for the United States to support the Iranian people's aspirations for a secular and democratic future. A recalibration of U.S. policy to prioritize regime change would align with these aspirations and contribute to long-term stability in the Middle East.

America's approach to Iran has historically been inconsistent, oscillating between appeasement and tactics that fail to address the underlying issues. This cycle of temporary fixes and diplomatic compromises has empowered Tehran's regime while alienating the Iranian people who yearn for genuine change. In October 2024, both President Biden and President Trump signaled reluctance for regime change in Iran, perhaps fearing the instability that such a shift could bring. However, with the fall of Assad's regime, the cycle of allowing the head of snake in Tehran to manipulate the political discourse with its regional warfare strategy has come to an end. A policy shift is necessary—one that empowers the Iranian people. For the U.S. to help cultivate a stable Middle East, a sound Iran policy centered on supporting regime change by the Iranian people is essential.

## I. Conditions for Regime Change in Iran:

We contend that the regime in Tehran is on the brink of collapse, both internally and externally, as mounting crises undermine its grip on power.

### A. An Iranian Regime Change

Internally, the Iranian regime faces widespread discontent fueled by economic collapse, social repression, and political illegitimacy. Iran exhibits several conditions historically associated with successful regime change, making it increasingly ripe for a change of regime initiated by its own people. Years of economic mismanagement and corruption, coupled with the severe effects of international sanctions, have driven the economy to the brink of collapse. Soaring inflation, high unemployment, and worsening living standards have created a population deeply frustrated with the

regime. This economic turmoil is compounded by socio-political repression, as the regime uses censorship, arbitrary arrests, and brutal crackdowns to suppress dissent. These pressures have ignited widespread public anger, resulting in large-scale protests and nationwide uprisings that challenge the legitimacy of the government.

At the heart of this unrest lies the rejection of the system of *velayat-e-faqih* (guardianship of the Ayatollah), which centralizes absolute power in the Supreme Leader. The Iranian people have increasingly demanded secular governance, signaling a profound delegitimization of the regime's authority. Since 2017, Iran has witnessed a series of significant nationwide uprisings that highlight the growing dissatisfaction of its population and the regime's inability to suppress mass mobilization, even with severe crackdowns and executions. These protests, sparked by economic hardships, political repression, and social grievances, have evolved into widespread movements that challenge the very legitimacy of the theocratic regime.

**The December 2017–January 2018** protests began in Mashhad as a response to economic hardships and government corruption but quickly spread nationwide. Demonstrators voiced their opposition to the theocratic regime and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, signaling a shift from economic grievances to broader political demands. Despite a violent crackdown that resulted in many deaths and more than 5,000 arrests, the protests set a precedent for subsequent uprisings.

**In November 2019**, a sudden increase in fuel prices triggered another wave of demonstrations across the country. This time, protesters were united in their grievances over economic mismanagement and political repression. The regime's response was brutal, with reports of more than 1,500 protesters killed and thousands arrested. Despite the severity of the crackdown, the protests demonstrated the regime's waning control over an increasingly mobilized and frustrated populace.

**The July 2021** protests, originating in Khuzestan province due to water shortages, expanded to other regions, addressing broader issues like economic difficulties and political repression. While the government once again resorted to repression, leading to many deaths and hundreds arrests, the resilience of the protesters underscored the regime's inability to address or contain the root causes of unrest.

The most significant uprising occurred between **September 2022 and early 2023**, following the death of Mahsa Amini while in police custody for allegedly violating hijab regulations. This event galvanized widespread protests that focused on women's rights but quickly evolved into demands for systemic political change. The government's response included mass arrests, executions, and a heavy-handed crackdown, yet the protests persisted, reflecting the deep and widespread rejection of the regime's authority.

#### **These movements reveal a pattern:**

- Despite the regime's severe crackdowns and attempts to suppress dissent through executions and arrests, mass mobilization continues to grow in volume and intensity.

- The persistence and breadth of these uprisings suggest that the regime’s repressive methods are increasingly ineffective, with each protest amplifying calls for systemic change and the rejection of the theocratic government.
- The Iranian people’s resilience has demonstrated that even the harshest repression cannot fully suppress their aspirations for freedom and justice.

### Internal Conditions for Regime Change in Iran

Condition	Evidence
<b>Collapsing Economy</b>	High inflation, unemployment, and corruption fuel widespread discontent.
<b>Delegitimize Leadership</b>	Nationwide protests and massive election boycotts reflect public rejection of Ayatollahs’ rule and compounded by the looming succession crisis beyond Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.
<b>Mass Mobilization</b>	Women, youth, and minorities continuously lead cohesive, large-scale uprisings.
<b>Organized Resistance</b>	There is an organized resistance offering an alternative with a clear governance plan for transition of power to the people after the fall of the regime.

### A Viable Alternative

The successive waves of protests and uprisings in Iran since 2017 are neither accidental nor spontaneous; they are the culmination of decades of resistance and careful resistance organization within the country. These movements have not arisen in a vacuum but rather within the context of a sustained and coordinated resistance effort led by the parliament in exile of the [National Council of Resistance of Iran \(NCRI\)](#), and on the ground network of [Resistance Units](#) of the [People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran \(MEK\)](#). Together, these forces represent the most persistent presence, organized and effective on the ground opposition to the regime, playing a pivotal role in shaping, sustaining, and amplifying the protests that challenge the theocratic government.

The NCRI serves as the political and organizational backbone of this resistance, presenting a clear roadmap for regime change and credible vision for a secular and democratic Iranian republic. This vision is articulated through its [Ten-Point Plan](#), which calls for gender equality, human rights, secular governance, and the abolition of the *velayat-e-faqih* single party system. Its commitment to a democratic republic and justice resonates deeply with the Iranian people, who see in it a viable alternative to the oppressive theocracy under Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. The council’s capable leadership, particularly Mrs. Maryam Rajavi, has guided the council and the resistance movement

through more than four decades of struggle against the century's most violent medieval theocracy, while simultaneously galvanizing international and domestic support for the Iranian people's democratic aspirations - bridging the gap between internal dissent and global solidarity.

Domestically, the Iranian Resistance Units—small, decentralized groups of activists—play a critical role in organizing protests, disseminating information, and maintaining the momentum of uprisings. These units operate covertly within Iran, often at great personal risk, to challenge the regime's narrative, and expose its crimes. Their activities range from organizing localized protests to broadcasting anti-regime messages, coordinating nationwide strikes, and other efforts to confront the regime's oppressive forces and its IRGC. By empowering ordinary citizens to act against the regime, the Resistance Units have helped transform individual frustrations into collective movements capable of destabilizing the regime's control. Indeed, multiple bipartisan U.S. Congressional Resolutions, including H.Res.1148, have called for the free world to recognize the rights of the Iranian people, the protesters, and these Resistance Units to confront the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and repressive forces to bring about change.

The MEK, a longstanding political organization, has played a pivotal role in both the fight against dictatorship in Iran and the broader struggle for a democratic future. Having survived the repression of the former dictatorial Shah's regime and the brutal crackdowns of the current theocratic government, the MEK remains one of the central organizational pillars of the NCRI. Of note, past Iranian revolutions of 1906, 1953 and 1979 were all homebred movements which aimed to marginalize or eliminate single party rule of dictators - a modo that NCRI adopted since its inception. One of the MEK's most significant strengths is its extensive, multigenerational network inside Iran. This internal infrastructure has been instrumental in providing vital information that has repeatedly exposed key aspects of the regime's operations, including clandestine nuclear activities, unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) programs, and the terrorist activities of the IRGC and Quds Force. Such information has informed sanctions policies, exposed human rights abuses, and highlighted the regime's involvement in regional destabilization through proxy wars.

By maintaining and nurturing its presence, connectivity and influence inside Iran, the MEK has sustained hope for systemic change and demonstrated that resistance against theocratic rule is not only possible but also increasingly organized. The organization's resilience and impact continue to inspire Iranians at home and abroad, as evidenced by annual Free Iran gatherings in Europe, demonstrating a high degree of organizational capability, coordination, and resilience. They reveal that the Iranian people's uprising is not a sporadic or disjointed series of events, but part of a broader strategy led by women to dismantle the theocracy and replace it with a democratic system.

Hence, the role NCRI and the MEK Resistance Units play in achieving this end cannot be overstated today. Despite the regime's heavy-handed tactics, including surveillance, censorship, and executions, the organized resistance continues to grow in strength and influence, inspiring more Iranians to join the fight for freedom. They provide not only the vision for a future Iran but also the practical means of achieving it. By fostering unity among the Iranian people and demonstrating an unwavering commitment to justice and democracy, these groups have ensured that the protests and uprisings are



more than isolated acts of defiance—they are the building blocks of a sustained and organized revolution.

The vision for a secular and non-nuclear republic Iran resonates with a broad swath of the population, galvanizing the hopes for a better future. However, significant obstacles remain. The regime's repressive apparatus, including the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Basij forces, play a key role in suppressing opposition movements. This machinery of repression is bolstered by pervasive surveillance and a propaganda network designed to discredit opposition groups and maintain an illusion of control. This oppressive machinery is also helped by Western policies which promote engagement with or outright appease the regime. Despite these barriers, the conditions for change are intensifying, driven by the people's growing resolve and the appeal of organized alternatives.

We call for a U.S. policy that seeks to support an alternative to the regime in Tehran and aligns with the call for a non-nuclear, secular republic in Iran. Such an alternative should include:

- A clearly articulated vision for the future of Iran.
- A proven track record of effective global communication, significant engagement with international policymakers, and the ability to mobilize widespread support among the Iranian diaspora.
- Demonstrated capability in building strong diplomatic alliances and fostering bipartisan support in influential forums such as the U.S. Congress and European parliaments.
- Active participation in international platforms, spotlighting Tehran's human rights violations and nuclear ambitions to shape global policy.
- Effective leadership capable of presenting a credible and inclusive vision that resonates with international democratic values and mobilizes support for regime change in Iran.
- Advocacy for global accountability through international sanctions and investigations into the regime's oppressive actions, ensuring a commitment to justice and human rights.

Conclusively, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) stands out as the sole organization fully meeting the outlined criteria for a viable alternative to the Tehran regime. This group's approach is both comprehensive and meticulously structured, showcasing a deep strategic understanding of both the domestic and international political landscapes. Maryam Rajavi's 10-point-plan emphasizes equality and justice, resonating with democratic values that appeal to a wide audience, both within Iran and internationally. This inclusivity ensures that the vision for a future Iran is one that encompasses the hopes and rights of every citizen.

## **A Regional Opportunity**

Tehran’s regional influence has suffered catastrophic setbacks, significantly isolated the regime and weakened its power projection. The rapid fall of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, a key strategic ally, has severed one of Tehran’s most critical connections in the Levant. Assad's regime served as a conduit for Iran to support Hezbollah and other militant groups, enabling it to extend its influence throughout the region. The recent setbacks, including the loss of strategic allies like Bashar al-Assad, the death of key figures such as President Ebrahim Raisi, and the elimination of Hassan Nasrallah and other proxy leaders have significantly impacted the roles and operational capacity of the **Quds Force** and the **Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)**.

Compounding these challenges which not only disrupted Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei’s plans for a smooth succession but also expose fractures within the regime’s leadership structure as evidenced by the public infighting among the highest echelon of IRGC in recent weeks. Raisi’s death left a leadership void at a critical juncture, amplifying the regime’s vulnerabilities. The situation has further deteriorated with the elimination of Hassan Nasrallah, the long-time leader of Hezbollah and a central figure in Iran’s proxy strategy in Lebanon. Nasrallah’s death has crippled Hezbollah’s operational capabilities and eroded Tehran’s influence in the region. The cascading losses for the regime since October 7, 2023, have not only disrupted Iran’s ability to wield power regionally but have also undermined its credibility among its remaining allies.

**External Setbacks Conducive for Regime Change in Iran**

Aspect	Impact on the Quds Force	Impact on Tehran’s Leadership
<b>Loss of Strategic Allies</b>	The fall of Assad in Syria disrupts logistical hubs critical for supporting proxies like Hezbollah and Hamas.	Weakens IRGC’s regional influence and limits its ability to sustain alliances that bolster Tehran’s agenda.
<b>Elimination of Key Leaders</b>	Hassan Nasrallah’s death disrupts Hezbollah’s operations; loss of Hamas leaders weakens Tehran’s reach in Gaza.	The death of Ebrahim Raisi destabilizes the regime’s power structure, reducing IRGC’s political leverage.
<b>Proxy Network Coordination</b>	Difficulty maintaining cohesion and effectiveness among proxies without key regional allies and leadership figures.	Strained resources as the IRGC must compensate for weakened proxy networks and operational failures.

<b>Domestic Repercussions</b>	Reduced regional influence undermines Tehran’s narrative of strength, emboldening opposition forces in Iran.	Increased focus on domestic suppression stretches IRGC resources further amidst growing infighting and social unrest.
<b>Operational Capacity</b>	Severely hampered ability to project power and carry out Tehran’s regional ambitions.	Financial and logistical disruptions impact IRGC’s dual role of domestic control and regional intervention.

Together, these developments signal a profound shift in the regional dynamics, creating an unprecedented opportunity for the people of Iran and the entire region. For the international community, particularly the United States and its allies, these events represent a critical opening to capitalize on Tehran’s vulnerabilities and support meaningful change in the region.

The convergence of these external setbacks with mounting internal discontent provides a rare moment of potential transformation for the Middle East. On December 11, 2024, during our [senate](#) Iran policy briefing, Senator Ted Cruz agreed and said, “Change is in the air.” At the same event, Senator Jean Shaheen acknowledged the fall of Assad’s regime and noted, “we want to see Iran to be next in terms of overthrowing.” She further [explained](#) how the end of Assad’s regime is, “a significant blow to” Tehran’s regime. Similarly, on December 17, 2024, during our community’s House [Iran policy event](#), members of the House from both parties [acknowledged](#) the need for regime change in Iran and that it is in fact within reach.

## II. Comprehensive and Proactive Framework

By adopting a strategy rooted in support for an Iranian regime change, the U.S. can align itself with the aspirations of the Iranian people while contributing to long-term regional stability and global security. The question is no longer whether Tehran’s regime can survive—it is how the international community, led by the United States, can best support a democratic transformation in Iran.

### A. Ending the influence of Tehran’s Proxy Forces

The Iranian regime utilizes two distinct types of proxy forces, each integral to its broader strategy for maintaining influence and deflecting both internal and external challenges. The first type includes militarized proxies, which are now weaker than ever as outlined above. The second type involves political proxies. In 2025, Tehran will increasingly rely on these political proxies to manipulate global opinion and suppress the momentum for an Iranian regime change. Recognizing and exposing the roles of these actors or entities is critical for fostering international support for authentic Iranian voices that struggles for freedom and justice.

These proxies come in the form of personalities, entities or even fake opposition and operate as a strategic component of Tehran's efforts to sustain its control and influence both domestically and internationally. Some are embedded in influential organizations or media outlets to covertly advance regime's interests while publicly pose as part of the opposition. Their main objectives of these proxies are:

1. **Diluting Genuine Opposition:** These proxies often infiltrate or mimic legitimate opposition movements to sow confusion and division. By creating or amplifying fractures within real resistance groups, these entities aim to weaken the opposition's effectiveness and dilute its message, making it harder for a unified and coherent challenge to emerge against the regime.
2. **Misleading International Audiences:** By masquerading as opposition, these proxies work to mislead international observers and policymakers about the true nature of dissent in Iran. They craft narratives that may downplay human rights abuses or exaggerate the stability and popularity of the regime, misleading foreign governments and international organizations about the actual dynamics within the country.
3. **Propagating Regime Narratives:** These actors are crucial in spreading the regime's narratives and disinformation. Through various media platforms, they broadcast content that supports the regime's perspectives and policies, often under the guise of independent reporting or analysis. This manipulation of information serves to maintain the regime's image and suppress factual reporting from Iran.
4. **Undermining Real Opposition Leaders:** Fake opposition groups often engage in campaigns to discredit and undermine real opposition leaders and their initiatives. This might involve smear campaigns, spreading falsehoods, or attributing malicious intent to the actions of legitimate opposition figures, thereby eroding public trust and support for these leaders.
5. **Influencing Policy and Public Opinion:** They may advocate for policies that superficially appear to promote change but ensure the continuation of the regime's fundamental ideologies and power structures.

To identify such entities or individuals, one can examine the record of Reza Pahlavi. Viewed skeptically by many Iranians, Pahlavi is often seen as lacking credibility and seriousness within Iranian politics. His actions suggest that he acts more as a figurehead or puppet, possibly manipulated by the IRGC (refer to the IRGC Intelligence Organization Confidential Document) and external interests, rather than as a genuine advocate for democratic reform. His inconsistent engagement with Iranian politics over the last four decades appears to be influenced by shifting alliances, aligning with the highest bidder, which casts doubts on his integrity and commitment to Iran's democratic and secular aspirations. Pahlavi's record shows:



- **Lack of Genuine Commitment:** Pahlavi has not provided solid, sustainable, clear or actionable solutions to Iran's issues, which undermines his position as a leader who can guide

the nation through significant changes. His statements and proposals often seem disconnected from the realities on the ground, suggesting a superficial understanding of the complex dynamics within Iran.

- **Role as a Puppet for External Interests:** There is a widespread belief among people of Iran that Pahlavi's initiatives and public appearances are orchestrated to serve foreign agendas rather than the interests of the Iranian people. He is deeply discredited among those who are deeply invested in seeing a truly indigenous movement succeed—one that is not perceived as being influenced by external powers.



- **Associations with Former IRGC Members:** Pahlavi has faced criticism for surrounding himself with individuals previously affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) or linked to Iran's Ministry of Intelligence (MOIS). His credibility has been further undermined by a recently exposed secret letter from the IRGC Intelligence Organization, which purportedly reveals efforts to exploit him for the regime's online influence operations. These associations raise serious concerns among those who oppose the current regime, highlighting the compromised nature

of his independence and the integrity of his opposition efforts.

- **Disconnect from Progressive Movements:** The nostalgia for the monarchy that Pahlavi espouses does not resonate with progressive movements within Iran, which strive for a break from authoritarian legacies of monarchy and mullahcracy. His focus on monarchist traditions is seen as a step backwards by those advocating for a forward-looking, republican form of governance.
- **Refusal to Denounce Qassim Suleimani's Elimination:** His refusal to denounce the killing of Qassim Suleimani, a major figure in the IRGC, further exposed his position. Suleimani was widely regarded as a key architect of Iran's regional military strategy and his elimination was seen by many as a blow to the IRGC's operations. Pahlavi's stance on this issue significantly showed whose interests he truly represents.
- **Ongoing Dialogue with IRGC and Paramilitary Forces:** Pahlavi's declared ongoing dialogues and connections with the IRGC and other paramilitary forces in Iran are particularly contentious. Such interactions are viewed by many within the opposition as undermining the movement's goal to establish a secular, democratic government free from the influence of

militarized power structures. It has also led to deep fractionalization within his circle or former supporters.

Reza Pahlavi exemplifies how the Iranian regime can manipulate and exploit opposition figures to its advantage. He serves as a cautionary tale of the regime's ability to co-opt and utilize supposed opposition to bolster its own standing both domestically and internationally.

## **B. Adopt an Unbiased Approach**

The United States faces challenges in pursuing a strategy for regime change in Iran, chief among them being Tehran's sophisticated and far-reaching misinformation apparatus. This apparatus has deeply infiltrated major global media outlets, academic institutions, and policy-making circles, shaping narratives that obscure the realities of Iran's internal resistance and misrepresent the viability of organized opposition movements. Tehran's influence operations mostly aim to discredit National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) and the MEK by portraying them as fringe entities, cults, terrorists, unpopular within Iran, or as foreign-backed conspiracies. These false narratives, entrenched in political bureaucracy, have not only skewed public perception but also influenced and hindered decisive policymaking within international institutions and governments, including the United States

Over the years, Tehran's propaganda machinery has been successful to derail the formation of a cohesive and principled U.S. policy on Iran. By amplifying voices that either downplay the regime's vulnerabilities or advocate appeasement, Tehran has succeeded in creating confusion and hesitancy among policymakers. For example, Tehran's intelligence services have promoted narratives of opposition fragmentation, particularly by referring to [less credible figures](#). Such tactics create biases and sows doubt about the existence of a viable alternative to the regime in the public domain.

The U.S. must actively counter such influence operations through a clear policy of strategic pivot towards and deeper engagement with the alternative.

## **C. Embrace a Democratic Roadmap for Regime Change and Transition to Democracy in Iran**

An effective U.S. policy framework crucially depends on dismissing the notion that no viable alternatives exist to the regime in Tehran. It is essential for Washington to recognize aspirations for democratic Iranian republic and engage the Iranian through their organized resistance. Without this engagement and resultant understanding, the U.S. will unfortunately not be sufficiently prepared for the inevitable fall of the Tehran's regime—a scenario that is a matter of when, not if. By actively engaging with, duly digesting and recognizing their transition plan, the U.S. will be better positioned to effectively navigate the future dynamics of the Middle East.

In November of 2024, Maryam Rajavi presented her roadmap for regime change at the European Parliament and highlighted the key elements for achieving an Iranian regime change which includes:

- **Empowerment and Mobilization by the Resistance Units** to break the barriers of fear and apathy by demonstrating the regime's internal vulnerabilities and inspiring more citizens to join the cause for freedom.
- **Utilizing Experienced and Capable MEK Network** to unify nationwide resistance efforts under a structured leadership, providing strategic direction and maintaining the momentum of the movement.
- **Continued International Advocacy** to isolate the current regime internationally, cutting off its resources and undermining its legitimacy, while preparing the international community to support a smooth transition.

Additionally, we point to the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) detailed outline and structured approach for transitioning to a new government once the current regime is overturned.

- **Provisional Government:** The initial step involves setting up a provisional government with a clear mandate to govern for a *maximum of six months*. This short-term government's primary responsibility is to stabilize the nation and prepare for democratic processes. Its most crucial task is to organize and conduct elections for a Constituent Assembly. This phase is foundational, as it sets the democratic precedents and frameworks that will guide Iran's future.
- **Constituent Assembly and Transfer of Power:** After the elections, *the Constituent Assembly takes charge*, marking a significant shift from provisional to more permanent democratic governance. At this point, the provisional government dissolves, having fulfilled its purpose. This marks the end of the NCRI's direct governance role, showcasing their commitment to a democratic transition by transferring authority to elected representatives of the people.
- **Establishing a New Government:** The Constituent Assembly, now in power, enters a critical *two-year period* where its duties include drafting, approving, and conducting a referendum on a new constitution. This constitution will lay down the legal and institutional framework for the new republic, ensuring that the governance structure is built on solid democratic principles and practices. This stage is pivotal as it not only shapes the legislative backbone of the new Iran but also solidifies the principles of justice and equality before the law.

Iranian American Communities, from across the US, representing 41 chapters, support such a roadmap because it not only aims to remove the current oppressive regime, but also to establish a sustainable model of governance that promotes human rights, economic prosperity, and peaceful international relations.

### III. 2025 Policy Recommendations

In 2025, the United States finds itself at a crucial juncture in redefining its policy towards Iran. The Organization of Iranian American Communities offer the following recommendations for the Trump Administration:

1. **Reinstate Maximum Pressure and Isolate Tehran:** Intensify diplomatic pressure on Tehran by immediately triggering the U.N. Snapback Sanctions Mechanism, fortifying international alliances, and imposing all forms of sanctions against key regime figures and organizations, such as the IRGC, which play central roles in repression and regional destabilization.
2. Identify and sanction regime officials across Iran's major provinces who are responsible for oppression and execution of women and political dissidents.
3. **Formal Recognition of the Opposition:** The U.S. should address the missing factor in the first iteration of the maximum pressure policy by recognizing Iran's legitimate opposition groups, such as the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) who are fighting for a democratic Iranian republic and endorse their roadmap for democratic regime change.
4. **Recognize Iranian people struggle for regime change:** As the U.S. Congress has recommended, U.S. policy should provide political support and amplify the voices of Iran's Resistance Units, and acknowledge in policy, their right to overthrow the current regime.
5. **Launch Initiatives to Debunk Misinformation:** Initiate efforts to counter Tehran's misinformation campaigns and investigate its lobbying network, focusing on those who attack the alternative. Conduct thorough investigations into entities tied to the "Iran Experts Initiative."
6. **Investigate and Designate IRGC Proxies:** Investigate their network and designate key individuals or groups acting as IRGC political proxies, including those in contact with or posing as opposition figures.
7. **Promote Accountability:** Advocate for international investigations into regime crimes, such as the 1988 massacre of political prisoners, protest massacres, and recent escalations in executions in Iran.
8. **Publicly Support Grassroots Campaigns:** Endorse grassroots movements like the "No to Execution" campaign by political prisoners in Iran to highlight ongoing human rights abuses.
9. **Prepare for Post-Regime Transition:** The U.S. must consider the aftermath of the regime's fall and work with allies to ensure readiness and discern the details of NCRI transition plan.

These recommendations provide an actionable framework for the incoming administration. By swiftly adopting and effectively implementing these measures, the United States can eliminate the threat of a nuclear regime in Tehran and foster a peaceful region with a democratic Iran.



