



find no foothold here. The emergence of such stars in a nation's political firmament requires pure soil enriched by the blood of its martyrs like Amir Kabir and Raisi.

What is your definition of Iran?

When we speak of Iran, we consider several dimensions: a geographical Iran, which resembles a cat in shape; a political Iran, which is larger and takes the shape of a lion; and a cultural Iran, which is as expansive as an elephant, extending to India and Tajikistan. Furthermore, the Islamic Revolution has added a new dimension to Iran, one that extends to virtually all countries with a Shia presence. The next circle encompasses the Islamic world, including non-Shia regions that have drawn closer to us due to their shared enmity with our greatest adversary, Israel. In my view, the foundations of Iranian identity are threefold: Shia Islam, which has been particularly significant since the Safavid era; the Persian language; and the country's geography and history. There is an often-overlooked aspect of Iran: the unique characteristic of Shia Islam being the majority religion here. Two groups have resisted discussions on this topic. The first group is the Pahlavis, who aimed

to revive pre-Islamic Iran. Their ideological approach led them astray, though pre-Islamic Iran is a reality worth acknowledging in its own right, not in opposition to Shia Islam. They feared an accurate portrayal of Shia Islam. The second group emerged as post-revolution during the rise of "Ummah-ism." Some hesitated to address this topic, fearing it might create divisions or upset Arab or Sunni brothers. This reluctance has allowed secular nationalism to grow alongside the Islamic Republic, which is dangerous.

Shia Islam is the majority in countries like Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, Yemen, Azerbaijan, and Kuwait, but these nations have not established a "Shia nation" as Iran has. Unlike Iran, they do not have a Shia majority identity.

After the revolution, when the idea of the "Ummah" (global Muslim community) gained prominence, some avoided discussing the significance of Shia Islam to prevent potential conflicts. However, this is crucial. The notion that all Muslims are equal has led some to adopt an anti-nationalist Ummah-ism, which is the opposite extreme of the Pahlavi view. Both perspectives are marked by excess. Any ideology, even Ummah-ism, must have a starting point, and for us, that is Iran.

The reluctance to discuss Shia Islam properly stems from a fear of causing division or offending Sunni Arabs. However, failing to address this has enabled secular nationalism to grow in our country, posing a significant risk. The reality is that while Shia Islam is the majority in some countries, they have not forged a Shia national identity as Iran has.

Do we owe nation-building to the Safavids or the Pahlavis?

We owe it to the Safavids. The Pahlavi dynasty cannot be compared to any other royal dynasty in Iran because unlike the others that naturally emerged, the Pahlavis

were dependent from the start. How can a dependent dynasty build a nation? This element of dependency is evident in the grandfather, father, and even the grandson of this family today.

What do you mean by a Shia nation? You mentioned that Azerbaijan also has a Shia majority but has not become a nation. What made Iran a nation?

This process began during the Safavid era when, through state action, Shia Islam transformed into a national identity in Iran. Some may argue that the religious scholars were not in charge at that time; however, this does not negate the fact. Ultimately, they engaged in cooperation. Anything that hinders the evolution and growth of this nation-building process is doomed to fail. Several forces initiated disruptions against this evolution. One was Nader Shah Afshar, who attempted to eliminate Shia Islam.

How can we balance nationalism and Ummah-ism?

It's a very difficult task. These two concepts do not easily align and there are inherent conflicts. For instance, even now, some within the country question why we invest so much in other Islamic countries that are neither Iranian nor Shia. In my view, one figure who has successfully maintained this balance is Qassem Soleimani. He was both a patriot and an international figure of resistance, a Shia and an Iranian, and everyone considered him one of their own. He was an extraordinary individual.

So, reality surpasses theory and we can observe it tangibly?

Yes, it is tangible. Soleimani didn't invent anything; he discovered that there is an inherent balance within the Islamic Revolution. More precisely, Soleimani wasn't an exceptional figure who just presented a balanced interpretation



Martyr President