

Options for Iran's self-determination, despite the complex politics of interests amid the chaos of conflicts

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Table of Contents

1. The Tenacious Struggle for Self-Determination
2. Asymmetrical vulnerability as a global phenomenon
3. Bitterness
4. Asymmetric violence as bitter self-determination
5. Nuclear armament as an extreme form of self-endangerment
6. Variations of local dominance in Iran
 - 6.1 Revolutionary Guards, even “without a government”
 - 6.2 Clerical fascism, firmly entrenched in a dead end
 - 6.3 Return of a Shah-style regime, with significant intervention by external nations; (e.g., Reza Pahlavi / Donald Trump)
 - 6.4 Attempt at popular rule, despite an initial lack of structures - according to Montesquieu - toward a form of democracy
7. Search for a new identity for Iran, amidst reforms of global society and the UN that are utopian for the time being
 - 7.1 Tools for conflict resolution under international law, by Johan Galtung
 - 7.2 Future politicians, shaped by happiness or suffering in childhood, with predictable consequences
 - 7.3 The future for Iran, with an awareness of culture, freedom, religiosity – and the UN Charter

1. The Tenacious Struggle for Self - Determination

Iran has been seeking a fundamental political remedy for a very long time. The Iranians' efforts toward self-determination began with the dawn of human civilization. Within the United Nations, any form of self-determination is contentious and, moreover, acutely hampered by violence. There have always been hopes, yet also hurdles that are difficult to overcome. There has often been suffering in Iran, caused by both internal and external violence. In particular, the years 2025–2026 saw dramatic conflicts. This article focuses both specifically on what changes are currently possible for Iran and on fundamental and longer-term characteristics. In this regard, much in Iran is similar to other nations among the 193 member states of the United Nations (UN).

Self-determination is a primary goal for every nation, for numerous groups, and ultimately for every single person. The UN Charter defines the UN as a kind of “conscience of humanity.” Not least, the situation in Iran demonstrates the difficulties the UN faces in attempting to apply its own Charter.

In the following, the term “Iran” refers to the nation and its society as a whole, not to a specific regime, nor to a particular majority or minority, nor to other groups. This is not about a bias for or against certain groups or specific power structures. However, it is always about the hope for the well-being of the population, for liberation from oppression, for the success of the infrastructure, and for internal and external peace. It is about a dignified future for Iran within the framework of the human community of destiny.

And it is about indispensable options that are currently being severely disrupted: “confidence-building measures” (CBMs), all the way to reconciliation.

In 2026, two socially committed individuals in Germany—who, despite having somewhat different political backgrounds, get along well—succeeded in fostering mutual understanding. The discussion centered on a possible reconciliation between Iran and Israel, building on historically documented instances of friendly encounters¹ :

During the conversation, in response to the journalist’s question:

“More and more Iranian exiles are taking to the streets alongside Jewish and Israeli organizations—an alliance with a future?”

This was the response:

“Omid Nouripour: There is a very long history of friendship to be proud of. Until the mid-1970s, Israel and Iran had the closest trade relations. Forty-seven years of hostility, unilaterally declared by the regime, cannot wipe away 2,500 years of deep friendship.”

And to:

Is there anything that gives both of you hope that the conflicts in the Middle East and on Germany’s streets will come to a good end?

These answers:

Josef Schuster: I hope that with the end of the war against the mullah regime, the hopes of the people in Iran and Israel will be fulfilled and that the mood in Germany will also ease again. But I am no dreamer. Anti-Semitism has existed for many hundreds of years and will not disappear anytime soon. To ensure it no longer reaches the scale it has had over the past two or three years, it comes down to moral courage—on the part of every single individual.

Omid Nouripour: I see significantly more mutual understanding in the societies of Israel and Iran. That is what we are currently lacking in Germany. But if people can muster empathy for one another even under bombardment, then that should surely be an inspiration to us.

¹ Felix Hackenbruch und Stephan-Andreas Casdorff (Text); Im Gespräch:

„Es gibt eine lange Geschichte der Freundschaft zwischen Israel und dem Iran“

Omid Nouripour ist Bundestags-Vizepräsident, Josef Schuster leitet den Zentralrat der Juden. Über die Einordnung des Iran-Kriegs sind die beiden sich nicht einig – wohl jedoch über Maßnahmen gegen Antisemitismus. Tagesspiegel 25. März, Seite 12

(Translation: = Felix Hackenbruch and Stephan-Andreas Casdorff (text); In conversation:

“There is a long history of friendship between Israel and Iran”; Omid Nouripour is Vice President of the Bundestag, Josef Schuster heads the Central Council of Jews. The two disagree on how to assess the Iran War—but they do agree on measures against antisemitism).

Such exemplary efforts give hope and confidence for the future, against the backdrop of many acute and unspeakable forms of violence. Of the 193 nations united as members of the United Nations, the majority needs constructive, hands-on confidence. Every person, every group, every nation wants to take control of its own destiny. Within the framework of the global community of shared destiny, no one has been able—and no one can—achieve this goal universally, one hundred percent.

The example of Iran illustrates the multitude of challenges, passions, and efforts particularly clearly. There are thresholds for significant changes in climate, health, technology, etc., known as tipping points. These points often lead to a deterioration. But positive “political tipping points” can be essential to overcome deterioration. For Iran, such a positive change is urgently needed given the brutally tragic social reality. The term has a wide range of meanings. A useful, objective reference in this case is a neutral AI-generated note from Google dated April 6, 2026:

Overview with AI

“Political tipping points are critical thresholds at which political systems, social norms, or geopolitical orders change abruptly and usually irreversibly. They often lead to a massive restriction of the ability to act, but – as positive tipping points – they can also trigger a self-reinforcing shift toward sustainable systems, for example through social dynamics or technological breakthroughs. ... Political tipping points are often difficult to predict, as they are based on complex feedback loops within society.”

For this article on Iran, a kind of handbook on positive political tipping points is used as a guide:² For years, the author Werner Mittelstaedt has warned of dangers as a scholar, pointed out undesirable developments, and specifically highlighted the dangerous tipping points in the climate. In his latest book, he identifies solutions to the dilemma – which are also fundamental for Iran – that are feasible at any time. While these solutions may seem far off at the moment due to the extensive damage caused by globally active autocrats alone, the author emphasizes that there is no cause for resignation. Nowhere has a completely irreversible tipping point been crossed.

This brings to mind Iran’s political situation. By successfully overcoming totalitarian regimes through a process largely self-determined by the people, positive tipping points for significant change can be achieved. It is by no means impossible. A historically surprising example was China’s “one-child policy” since 1979. It was successful, though unfortunately accompanied by a series of human rights violations, which are detailed and accurately documented by the IGFM (International Society for Human Rights); see <https://www.igfm.de/>. What remains difficult, however, is a constructive (not merely “neutral”) assessment of the existential risk of overpopulation and the harm and suffering it entails.

In his book, author Werner Mittelstaedt illustrates many constructive approaches to seemingly impossible challenges. His key themes are directly relevant to Iran, for example in the chapters on “Migration,” “Democracy,” “Education,” and especially “Nuclear Weapons and Military Build-up,” right through to “Adapting to the Climate Crisis.”

Currently, immense suffering and damage in Iran are preventing solutions to these problems. However, it is a matter of awareness, confidence, and having constructive ideas for improvement.

² Werner Mittelstaedt: „Wie das Unmögliche möglich wird – Skizzen für ein neues Fortschrittsnarrativ“, Frank und Timme, Berlin, (2026), 198 S. (tr.: = How the Impossible Becomes Possible – Sketches for a New Narrative of Progress)

For Germany, this also involves providing active assistance, particularly to countries such as Iran, Syria, Ukraine, and the Sahel.

The great power of Persia played a major role in the early development of civilization

A brief overview based on Google AI:

In ancient times, beginning around 550 BCE, Persia was a powerful empire founded by Cyrus the Great (Achaemenid Dynasty). It stretched from the Indus River to Egypt and was known for its efficient administration, the "Immortal" army, and magnificent cities such as Persepolis. It was one of the greatest empires of antiquity, at times encompassing territories in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Central Asia, and Egypt. The fall of the first era: In 330 B.C., Alexander the Great conquered the empire and destroyed Persepolis. Yet Persia remained a major power until 651 A.D. (the Neo-Persian Empire of the Sassanids).

Over the millennia and up to the present day, Persia has always been a center for art, architecture, and infrastructure. This included, for example, the early construction of royal roads and underground irrigation canals. Ancient Persia was strongly influenced by Zoroastrianism, yet it was often characterized by religious tolerance (e.g., under Cyrus). Ultimately, Islam shaped the region's understanding of ethical behavior, leading to its current degeneration through clerical fascism.

As a sovereign state, Persia was a founding member of the League of Nations (1920–1946). After World War I, the League had set itself the goal of resolving international conflicts through diplomacy and ensuring security. But great powers such as Great Britain and the Soviet Union wielded strong influence. Persia managed only with great difficulty and to a limited extent to maintain its neutrality in the 1930s and 1940s. The League of Nations was largely ineffective in preventing aggression.

Fundamental to Iran's self-determination is its self-image as a state that has long been highly civilized – with external encroachments that must be definitively and completely overcome. Its own arbitrary rule and violence, both internally and externally, were officially described – as they are today – as defensive and indispensable for self-preservation. But there was hardly any freedom of speech.

Iran: A Nation of Contrasts and an Interested Co-Founder of the UN

Iran is also a founding member of the United Nations (UN) and has actively participated in the organization since its founding in 1945. Iran as one of the 51 founding states signed the United Nations Charter on June 26, 1945, in San Francisco.

Iran is not a model for a rules-based order. While Iran has ratified important treaties binding under international and human rights law, and publicly affirms its treaty obligations – particularly to the United Nations - the Islamic Republic unfortunately violates these treaties on a daily basis through torture, arbitrary detention, the disenfranchisement of women and minorities, and support for terrorism worldwide.

As a result, Iran is frequently criticized by UN bodies and special rapporteurs. Among the crimes are brutal police crackdowns, etc., against peaceful demonstrators; torture and degrading treatment or punishment, such as flogging and amputations; and public executions, including executions of minors. Further it contains discrimination

against religious minorities, women, and human rights advocates, as well as systematic restrictions on freedom, particularly the right to freedom of expression.

2. Asymmetrical vulnerability as a global phenomenon

In the near future, the military spending of the “United Nations” nations currently engaged in rearmament is heading toward three trillion dollars worldwide, with the U.S. standing out at about one trillion dollars. That would still be more than the combined total of the next nine nations, with Germany ranking seventh. The U.S. could “win” a war against these nine nations, whether with or without the use of nuclear weapons. How, then, is it possible for a nation like Iran to wage a weekslong war against the U.S. and Israel? How is it possible that the U.S. ended wars like those in Vietnam, Iraq, etc., in frustration rather than “winning” them?

Historically and currently, comparatively weak nations are hardly in a position to defend themselves against aggression from powerful nations. At best, the UN sends a few of its own soldiers as neutral observers to conflict zones, where one must fear for their safety. They are supposed to separate opposing sides, but this succeeds at best temporarily and only under specific conditions that are of no interest to major powers.

“Weak countries” are generally understood to mean “developing countries,” also known as the “Global South,” which includes nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The term “Third World” dates back to the Cold War era, and while the plight of the population has changed in many details since then, it has hardly changed in any fundamental way.

The key to understanding is, in an increasing number of cases, asymmetric warfare combined with the asymmetric vulnerability of a population that is suffering greatly but is defenseless. Not only is the gap between rich and poor widening, but autocrats also demonstrate a high degree of resilience compared to the prospects of a population controlled by its own (!) militia, police, and intelligence services. There are isolated exceptions; for instance, Iran’s Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei was killed in Tehran on February 28, 2026, during an Israeli-American airstrike at the start of the war.

Mid-April this war has not ended after several weeks, and experts worldwide offer a contradictory array of opinions, most of which are well-founded. In fact, there is an enormous range of nations that are quite adept at asymmetric warfare and “successful” in the interests of their own autocrats - mostly at the cost of unspeakable destruction of their own society, population, ecology, etc. In which direction might Iran develop? The internal and external factors influencing Iran are constantly changing in ways that are difficult to foresee. “Islam,” for example, is important, but its forms are dramatically diverse globally. That is why this chapter aims to clearly and vividly illustrate precisely this diversity of efforts and obstacles; that is why it is the longest chapter.

The association with global expertise on the circumstances and consequences is

“Aktion Dritte Welt e. V.; Informationszentrum 3. Welt; <https://www.iz3w.org/>.”

It is highly alert and up-to-date regarding human rights. It deliberately continues to use the old term “Third World” because essential characteristics - especially the hardships faced by the population and political dependencies - essentially persist, much as they did in the past. It highlights the violence currently prevalent worldwide, particularly in the Third World. This includes the appalling variety of perpetrators’ actions and the bitter helplessness of the affected victims. Much of this applies to Iran

as well. A few quotes from issue 413 of iz3w³, with five examples illustrating radical change:

Example 1 in iz3w issue 413:

On page 5, Nikolas Grimm: „Bibel statt Kettensäge – Der ultrarechte Kandidat José Antonio Kast siegt in Chile (Dez. 2025): (tr.: = “Bible Instead of Chainsaw – Far-Right Candidate José Antonio Kast Wins in Chile (Dec. 2025)):

“We must engage in uncomfortable and unsparing self-reflection. ... The mood is somber: Jara, the former labor minister, had run for the ruling coalition. After winning the first round, she fell far behind the far-right candidate José Antonio Kast in the second round with only 41.8 percent... The occasion is marked not only by the political left’s heaviest electoral defeat since Chile’s return to democracy in 1990, but also by the fact that the political mood in the country has changed radically over the past four years. Just four years ago, thousands celebrated the newly elected Gabriel Boric, who promised in his victory speech: “If Chile was the cradle of neoliberalism, it will also be its grave.” A new constitution seemed within reach, and society ready to finally step out of the long shadow of Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship, which continues to shape the political and economic system to this day.”

Example 2 in iz3w issue 413:

On pages 28–29, there is an interview by Kathi King and Claudia Moser from Comet-ME, an NGO. It documents facts that are now hardly denied. The relationship between Iran and Israel can be assessed in different ways; many contexts are fundamental to this. Similar to the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel in 2023, described in detail, the example documented by iz3w shows the bitterness that has taken root in the Middle East. The headline:

“Chaos is part of the control system”

An excerpt, beginning with the question:

“The West Bank is a contested territory; armed people in uniform are a common sight. Which armed groups are present in the region?”

The answer:

“The Bedouin communities we primarily work with live in what is known as Area C, which makes up 62 percent of the West Bank. Since the 1994 Oslo Accords, it has been under full Israeli military and civilian control. The Israeli army is always present here - those who live here see them every day. As the occupying power, Israel is obligated to provide civilian infrastructure for the Palestinian population. But Israel has never supplied the Arab and Bedouin communities in this sparsely populated, rural area with electricity or running water. That is why Comet-ME’s work focuses on meeting the need for electricity and water. ...”

And moving on to:

“How would you describe your infrastructure work?”

After October 7, the situation in the West Bank changed dramatically. There was a massive escalation of violence by radical settlers. They literally took the

³ iz3w – informationszentrum 3. Welt, Heft Nr. 413, März/April 2026: “Vorwärts Marsch – die neue Militarisierung.“ (Tr.: = “Forward March – The New Militarization.”)

law into their own hands, as almost all stationed soldiers had been deployed to Gaza or Lebanon. They began to control and terrorize the region, breaking into houses and apartments, intimidating people, killing animals, and burning down houses and mosques. Families who had lived there for generations were forced to flee.

Two weeks after the war began, we visited a community in the southern highlands of Hebron called Khirbet Zanuta. The residents were attacked by radical settlers almost daily. They asked for surveillance cameras. It's important to note that when Palestinians call the police or go to the police station to file a report, they are usually told that nothing can be done without evidence.

So we distributed surveillance cameras. From the feedback we've received, we know that the cameras have created a sense of security. People are also using the footage for legal purposes and sharing it on social media and with the press. This provides evidence and documentation of the events, even if it doesn't prevent acts of violence."

What do similar reports of damage caused by Iran and Iranian-backed terrorist organizations such as Hamas and Hezbollah mean? Under international law, every nation and every group is initially responsible for "its own" actions. Insofar as terrorist organizations are not merely supported by Iran but have been and continue to be completely (!) controlled by Iran, one argument is, that Iran would "de facto" already for a long time has been in a state of war against Israel, and everything Israel has destroyed in Iran since March 2026 would have been the result of a counterattack. This remains a matter of diplomatic dispute. Another aspect concerns proportionality. Any attempt at "preemptive self-defense" in the name of declared self-defense is highly controversial.

Example 3 in iz3w issue 413

Iz3w documents a great deal of arbitrary violence without any basis in international law. An example on page 30, noted by Bernhard Schmid, summarized here:

"Hilfe, die Helfer kommen. Milizen und Militärs im Sahel drangsaliieren die Bevölkerung (Help, the helpers are coming - militias and the military in the Sahel are harassing the population).

In Sahel states such as Niger and Mali, the military staged coups. They promised security to the population plagued by militias, but nothing came of it. The three core states of the Sahel region - Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, which have been led by military governments since 2020, 2022, and 2023, respectively - are currently learning this lesson. Since September 2023, they have been united in the Alliance of Sahel States (AES). The military coups primarily justified themselves by claiming that their rise to power served to establish security. This refers above all to the suppression of jihadist violence in the region, which has been escalating since the early 2010s.

However, jihadist organizations - particularly the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims, which is affiliated with the international Al-Qaeda network - are currently on the rise. This is especially true in Mali and Burkina Faso. In the neighboring Republic of Niger, the Islamic State in the Sahel has currently prevailed in the power struggle between jihadist groups. This group is the regional offshoot of the Islamic State (IS), which was originally based primarily in Syria and Iraq.

The Islamic State in the Sahel achieved a spectacular propaganda success through a midnight attack on the airport of the Nigerien capital Niamey on the night of January 28–29, 2026. The attack claimed dozens of lives on both sides.

Iz3w documents, by comparing two Islamic nations with similar starting conditions in many respects, how radically different state structures can develop. In this context, an army or a hegemonic militia can occupy central positions.

Example 4 in iz3w issue 413

On pages 34–36, by Thomas Gugler: “Hinter den Normalitätsfassaden; Krieg als Ordnungskraft in Pakistan und Afghanistan (tr.: = “Behind the Facades of Normality - War as a Force of Order in Pakistan and Afghanistan”):

In the new multipolar world order, political and economic power is contested. ... Where systems of meaning collapse, security policy assumes the role of reason. ... States of war no longer appear as exceptions, but as legitimate instruments for establishing peace, security, and order. Military force is linguistically and morally reinterpreted in the name of peace. Interventions are called “peace missions” or “humanitarian operations,”

At the same time, militarization remains the most extreme example of the instrumentalization of norms and narratives by state authorities: On the one hand, economic incentives are not enough to motivate people to die in battle. On the other hand, these “sovereignty expenditures” come at the expense of central civilian tasks such as education, health, infrastructure, administration, and social services. Therefore, it is traditionally weak and clientelistic states that invest disproportionate resources in security services and military apparatuses.

Despite all global patriarchal dominance, is there also hope and success for freedom movements, especially those led by and for women? The answer is yes, from the consciously democratic and pragmatically self-defensive group VPJ in Syria. Even if this example cannot currently be implemented in a similar way in Iran, it can still serve as a model for raising awareness against arbitrariness and violence, alike the courageous social protests in Iran.

Example 5 in iz3w issue 413

This article is fundamental, so here is a slightly more detailed quote from issue 413 of iz3w, pages 37–39, as contributed by Luna Azalea and Naim Schieber: „Widerstand ist Leben – Gesellschaftliche Selbstverteidigung jenseits des Staates“, (“Resistance Is Life – Social Self-Defense Beyond the State”):

Did the ceasefire agreement following the recent large-scale offensive by Islamist government forces seal the end of the democratic autonomous region in northern/eastern Syria? In Rojava, armed struggle to defend this autonomy has been an ever-present reality up to now. However, the concept of “self-defense” differs fundamentally from the military logic of capitalist states - and does not lose its significance even in the current situation.

The achievements of the women’s revolution are under attack. ... “Whether HTS or ISIS - to us, they’re the same Islamists with different names,” the women tell us again and again. It took years to fight through the devastation wrought by ISIS. “Now everything is starting all over again.” Now, three months later, the women’s centers in Raqqa and Tabqa - where the jihadist

group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) first invaded - lie in ruins. The achievements of the women's revolution threaten to be shattered by the tanks of HTS and the imperialist ignorance of the U.S. and its allies.

The January 29 agreement, which provides for the comprehensive integration of the institutions of the Democratic Self-Administration into the Syrian state, leaves the question of women's rights completely unanswered. Only one thing is already clear - nothing will be the same as before.

While the Democratic Self-Defense Forces (SDF) of the Self-Administration were until recently highly praised partners of the U.S. and Europe in the fight against ISIS, they are now making deals with forces that are organizationally and ideologically linked to ISIS. The recent attacks on the self-administration have once again demonstrated what the people of Rojava have long warned about: that a peaceful Syria is hardly not possible with the transitional government. The new government led by HTS relies on a network of Islamist militias that are significantly supported by Turkey.

The YPJ is organized as an all-women's structure, which means that no man can give them an order at any level. ... "The foundation must be women. That is the decisive factor for the survival of any struggle," Viyan adds. "As women, it has always been clear to us that we must defend ourselves. We draw on a long history of women's resistance." Despite patriarchal social structures, war, and the rise of the so-called Islamic State, the women of the YPJ have managed to build their own defense structures, which have endured for more than 12 years. They gained worldwide attention in 2015–2016 during the fight against ISIS, which, supported by Turkey, launched large-scale attacks. And now they stand firm against the new Syrian government.

We will defend women's dignity. ... Love is knowledge, knowledge is love. What makes them so strong, we ask? "Love. Deep love for our sisters and for society," they reply. "The patriarchal system has led to women being divided. It is important to create a unifying identity among women. Only to the extent that we know one another can we defend ourselves."

The training of female fighters is not just about learning how to handle a weapon. A large part of it is also education, they explain. Education about the country's history, the formation of states, the philosophy of Abdullah Öcalan, the history of women's resistance worldwide, the origins of patriarchy, and how it has shaped their own personalities. ...

Knowledge is not viewed as something separate from one's own life, but is intended to bring about a change in mentality, in the way of living and fighting. This includes understanding one's own oppression, comprehending the world and oneself within it, and being able to change it."

From the children's perspective, the violence they have suffered continues to grow and has reached "unprecedented proportions"⁴.

Another issue of iz3w focuses on the impact of AI on political responsibility. Iran, too, will increasingly have to confront the challenges and risks outlined there⁵ :

⁴ Gemäß Nachrichtenagentur ADP: „UN Höchststand bei Gewalt gegen Kinder in Kriegen“, in: Tagesspiegel 21. 6. 2025, S. 4 (According to the ADP news agency: "UN: Violence Against Children in Wars at an All-Time High")

⁵ Slave Cubela: "Die Jahre des beginnenden Ruins – Umriss einer politischen Kollapsologie unserer Gegenwart"; in: iz3w Heft Nr. 412, Jan/Feb 2026, S. 6; (Tr.: = Slave Cubela: "The Years of Incipient Ruin – Outlines of a Political Collapsology of Our Present")

“Adorno was right when he essentially stated that the world was never in order. Nevertheless, what is currently happening around us is extraordinary. For instance, there is still trust in technological progress when it comes to dealing with the looming ecological collapse. Meanwhile, religious fundamentalism is growing unstoppably worldwide.

Ranks of highly decorated scientists are warning of an impending ecological catastrophe. But at the same time, very few members of these so-called knowledge societies are willing to rethink and change their lives in this regard.”

Accordingly, for example many “strong” nations are unwilling to reduce their sometimes high levels of energy waste. Just as a result, Iran can, in the Strait of Hormuz, inflict significant damage on the distant “strong nations” with asymmetrically low effort and limited military effectiveness.

3. Bitterness

Despite rampant damage, the emotional attitude of the regime and the population will be the main determining factor for any future role of Iran. It is about Iran’s self-perception of its own identity. Everyone is embittered - the population, the regime, and all manner of those prone to violence. Partly against one another, partly directed outward. The standard is harsh. Fundamentally, it remains incomprehensible for the time being how the extent of “perfect” domestic violence, of military capabilities that are at times amateurish when directed outward, and of an overall hypocritical ethic could have been sustained for decades at all. But what does “for the time being” mean?

Overcoming bitterness requires character and strength over a long period of time. We Europeans needed what felt like eons before we could, with John Stuart Mill, begin to grasp the value of a liberal identity:

“It seems a people can be progressive for a certain distance and then come to a standstill. When does it stand still? When it ceases to possess individuality.”

And as threats to success, he cites “...malice, bigotry, and intolerance,” as well as “a lack of sincerity.”

Varlam Shalamov showed that the last resort for a person in extreme distress (he was in the Soviet Gulag “Kolyma 1”) is to maintain his bitterness; here are four of his 46 insights, noted in 1961⁶:

“What I learned and realized in the camp:

1. The extraordinary fragility of human culture and civilization. Within three weeks, a person was turned into a beast - under hard labor, cold, hunger, and beatings.

4. I have realized that a person retains bitterness the longest. The flesh of a starving person is sufficient only for bitterness - toward everything else, he is indifferent.

16. I realized that one can live on bitterness.

29. The passion for power, for unhindered murder, is great - from the high-ranking officials down to the ordinary operativniki - with a rifle (Seroshapka and his ilk).

⁶ Varlam Schalamov: „Durch den Schnee – Erzählungen aus Kolyma I“, Matthes & Seits, Berlin (2007); P. 289-293; (tr.: = Through the Snow – Tales from Kolyma I”)

Does Insight 29 reveal malice, or the callousness of the guards? Or both? No matter how cruel and irrational the world around them may seem, or even be in fact - some people can still cling to their own hope and moral bitterness - out of the conviction that something worthy of humanity always remains possible, so that one fights for it and for one's own survival every day - no matter how slim the prospect of success may be. Bitterness can, but need not, be boundless.

This concerns what is inevitably and keenly observed within the state of Iran, out of a sense of one's own potential vulnerability. It is a long road from such insight or foreboding to actual realization. An example: In the case of Israeli actions in the Middle East, we can observe what new, clearly disproportionate atrocities - first in Israel, then in Gaza - such bitterness can actually trigger.

It arises from "inherently natural" bitterness, regardless of whether anyone internally and/or externally deems it "justified" or "unjustified." In this context, practically any claim that "the other side started with violence" holds true when both sides have been provoking growing bitterness over a long period of time. However, those who fail to get their problem under control can cause enormous damage, ranging from their own lives to the global environment.

A spontaneous escalation of bitterness can occur at any time, as in Israel following a brief moment of shock on October 23, 2023. Historically speaking, this can cause a state of shock-induced paralysis in Israel for months, unfortunately already resulting in enormous damage in the Middle East. This drastically disproportionate damage, in turn, could trigger another 2,500 years of worldwide resentment against Israel, perhaps even against "the Jews as a whole." The decisive trigger stimulus may subjectively regard a Zionist-exemplary mindset as virtually a given for themselves. Such assessments are largely irrelevant to the political assessment that is de facto effective on a global scale. Anyone witnessing the escalating destruction in the Gaza Strip can surmise that, historically speaking, Netanyahu will soon be viewed de facto as the most effective anti-Semite. The technical superiority of one's own weapons often exacerbates such problems - and cements them, to the extent that confidence-building measures (CBMs) with adversaries are deliberately avoided, at least postponed, especially during negotiations to end a war.

Iran (whether as a population, a state, a "constitutional state," or a similar entity) should avoid such a constellation at all times and in the long term. The discrepancy between Iran's offensive rhetoric and its defensive military restraint stems not least from its own vulnerability - militarily, as well as in terms of its police forces and the paramilitary "Revolutionary Guards," who have increasingly been tasked with unfairly - we would say deliberately undemocratically - combating potential opposing political groups.

Causes of Resentment

Arbitrariness and violence are structurally as prevalent in Iran as they are globally in other states. Authorities such as the paramilitary Revolutionary Guards and the FARAJA police command - formed in 1992 by merging the police, gendarmerie, and the Islamic Revolutionary Committee - are responsible for the high level of bitterness among the Iranian population, particularly among exiles. Indicators of the extent of this bitterness include the number of executions in Iran (972 in 2024; only China had more) and the number (difficult to estimate) of murders worldwide carried out by Iranian intelligence services.

Iran is by no means unique. True constitutional states, with correspondingly low levels of hostility, are rare globally. At best, the state's power is somewhat limited by laws, and citizens have rights and freedoms that are reasonably protected by the state. This also applies to democracies. There, even alarmist measures by authorities

against - more suspected than actual - violence can take bizarre forms - in the name of "the rule of law." Thus, in 2025, there is a massive trial lasting many months against Daniela Klette, who is associated with the former RAF, involving extreme costs, the deployment of hundreds of heavily armed officers, and a 600-page indictment - even though the case is not about RAF activities at all, but rather a few robberies. It is panic on the part of bureaucrats in the wrong place. The Federal Republic of Germany is threatened a thousand times more by the AfD, which is allowed to exploit freedom of speech to align itself with impunity in the tradition of the old Nazis up to 1945.

Bitterness can also arise in reactions to Iran. For instance, in the U.S., Trump's former national security advisor, John Bolton, was granted protection due to an "imminent threat from Iran," but this was terminated in 2025 by an angry Trump - and even publicly announced.

For asylum seekers - and their children - from Iran, the extent of bitterness and/or liberation in Berlin can depend heavily on the behavior of the authorities.

Iran's attempts to avoid political dead ends

For Iran, having experienced and recognized its own inability to defend itself, it has become existentially important to strictly avoid further threats to its own security. Economic weakness and social frustration simultaneously pose a serious threat to the government. And the military, which is virtually systematically outdated (the U.S. takes advantage of this by supplying Iran's potential adversaries with state-of-the-art weapons), makes wars like Iran's against Iraq impossible. Thus, Iran also appeared cautious toward Israel for good reason. This includes the assumption by many experts that Iran is on the verge of producing nuclear weapons and must be prevented from doing so by a preemptive strike. This was discussed in an even more ambivalent/speculative manner immediately after Israel's attack:

On the one hand, the technical and economic capabilities for manufacturing nuclear bombs were deliberately curtailed by massive destruction

On the other hand, the determination to produce them could be reignited and/or greatly strengthened by the bitterness caused by the attack.

More precise data on both will be available shortly. Now, following the attack, one factor may be how vulnerable the regime is perceived to be within its own country and among its own population. For internally, the Iranian regime is threatened by multiple weaknesses such as:

An embarrassing discrepancy between verbal aggression (throwing Israel into the sea...) and military-technical inferiority. The latter can hardly be denied anymore since the attack beginning on February 28, 2026. It was so blatant that it was likely considered only marginally possible internally. For a long time, the regime has been increasingly unable to "explain" its own glaring weaknesses to its own Revolutionary Guards.

Added to this are enormous external ambitions, particularly from the U.S. and Israel, to prevent an Iranian nuclear bomb. Iran's fixation on this goal dates back to a time long past. Only a technically diverse, state-of-the-art nuclear power could serve as a deterrent. Iran is far from this, not least due to sanctions. The regime's moral protest - that, so to speak, no country other than Iran is denied nuclear weapons - is understandable yet futile: not even an excessively militarized North Korea - which cannot serve as a model for a state like Iran that sees itself as religiously ambitious.

At the same time, the regime is affected by the population's internally frustrating living conditions, coupled with glaring injustices and the arbitrariness of state power. This extends to the arbitrary persecution of real and suspected opposition within the state.

German Reactions

A legal and legitimate *raison d'état* for Germany can only be possible within the framework of the United Nations Charter. This cannot include participating in crimes. Germany must not do such a thing to its own enemies, and certainly not to its own friends.

For Iran, it is crucial for the future that Europe did not participate in the war waged by the U.S. and Israel against Iran in March/April 2026.

The term "terrorists" encompasses a vast spectrum, ranging from murderers to freedom fighters; from private (limited) to state-sponsored (sometimes genocidal) terror; from haphazard genocide to liberation and democracy for an entire society. Iran's behavior is correspondingly controversial - including in the German debate. In Germany's case: The number of regrettable victims is comparatively small, yet it is devotedly dramatized by the media.

A change in the terror emanating from Iran is highly desirable. While this may constitute an attempt at a final act of self-defense against near-genocidal attacks in the midst of an acute war, it must by no means be preventive, as has been the case for decades. Iran and the U.S. have agreed to a ceasefire, and negotiations to end the war are scheduled to begin on January 10, 2026. CBMs are difficult, because the war has further provoked Iran's entrenchment in bitterness. Neither the development of nuclear weapons nor Iran's terrorism is worthwhile - the damage to Iran is more massive than that inflicted by any of its adversaries. The clerical-fascist regime's attempts at survival cannot lead to a solution.

Even in diplomatic relations between Israel and Germany, there is repeated bitterness on both sides. This is strange, indeed cause for concern. It follows directly from our history of the genocide committed against the Jews that support for Israel is part of our *raison d'état*. That tolerating crimes cannot be part of this was emphasized by Angela Merkel as Chancellor in 2008 before the Knesset⁷ :

Angela Merkel: Excerpts from the speech before the Knesset (2008)

"We can draw strength from a source that has guided us in past decades: the power of trust. This power of trust is rooted in the values that we - Germany and Israel - share: the values of freedom, democracy, and respect for human dignity. It is the most precious asset we have: the inalienable and indivisible dignity of every single human being - regardless of gender, ancestry, language, faith, homeland, or origin." And she concludes her speech with:

"Yes, these are special, unique relations - with an enduring responsibility for the past, with shared values, with mutual trust, with great solidarity for one another, and with united confidence. In this spirit, we celebrate today's anniversary. In this spirit, Germany will never leave Israel alone, but will be a loyal partner and friend."

⁷ „Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Dr. Angela Merkel vor der Knesset am 18. März 2008 in Jerusalem: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/service/newsletter-und-abos/bulletin/rede-von-bundeskanzlerin-dr-angela-merkel-796170>; 249 ff. (speech by Federal Chancellor Dr. Angela Merkel before the Knesset on March 18, 2008, in Jerusalem)

Angela Merkel also addressed the role of Iran before the Knesset; this was highlighted in an excerpt from a German book on Iran's role and options:⁸ :

“How do we deal with the fact that, in polls, a clear majority of respondents in Europe say the greater threat to the world comes from Israel and not, for example, from Iran? Do we politicians in Europe then shy away out of fear of this public opinion from imposing further and tougher sanctions on Iran to persuade it to halt its nuclear program? No, however uncomfortable it may be, that is precisely what we must not do.”

Commitment to values must be honest, pragmatic, and committed, even to the point of a certain willingness to take risks. This is certainly possible in Germany in an exemplary way⁹:

“The departure from X (formerly Twitter): More than 60 universities and institutes in Germany are ending their activities on Elon Musk's platform. ‘The withdrawal is a consequence of the incompatibility of the platform's current direction with the core values of the participating institutions: cosmopolitanism, scientific integrity, transparency, and democratic discourse,’ according to a joint statement by the institutions.”

Against this backdrop, it is striking how vastly different German authorities are in their dealings with Iranian groups of all kinds. Sometimes they want to help German industry secure contracts from Iran - other times they restrict such activities in the name of “German national interest regarding Israel.” Sometimes they try to integrate exiles, other times they fear that exiles might be visited by Iranian intelligence agents:

“A well-established network of institutions and individuals ensures the mullahs' influence in Europe. This is no secret. Many Iranian institutions are tolerated; some are secured through cooperation with German business and politics. For critics of the regime here, this poses a constant danger.” And:

“The cooperation between the Iranian intelligence service and the Federal Intelligence Service is also politically explosive, as it may even have facilitated the latter's machinations at times.”

It is important to counter these risks with a clearly rule-based order. It is wrong to act out of a moral reflex, such as rigidly and unthinkingly invoking a German *raison d'état* for Israel out of fear of “anti-Semitism.” This must be clear, even if a number of different anti-Semites indiscriminately condemn any aid to Israel.

Some considerations are difficult. Precisely for this reason, the refusal of many nations in Europe to participate in the 2026 war against Iran is valuable. Citing the lack of a UN mandate as a reason makes sense. Likewise, the initially cautious wording from the Chancellery:¹⁰ :

“Germany will contribute in an appropriate manner to ensuring free navigation in the Strait of Hormuz.”

⁸ Matthias Küntzel: “Deutschland, Iran und die Bombe – eine Entgegnung – auch auf Günter Grass“, LIT Verlag, Berlin (2012); Dokument VI: „Angela Merkel: Auszüge der Rede vor der Knesset“, (2008), S. 249 f.; (Germany, Iran, and the Bomb – A Response – Also to Günter Grass; document VI: Angela Merkel: Excerpts from the Speech to the Knesset) (2008), p.)

⁹ Tillmann Warnecke: “Nicht vereinbar mit Grundwerten – 60 deutsche Hochschulen verlassen X“, Tagesspiegel 11. 1. 2025, S. 14; (Incompatible with Fundamental Values – 60 German Universities Leave X)

¹⁰ Christopher Ziegler: Christopher Ziegler: “Schweigen zu Trump, Abwarten an der Tankstelle, Helfen in Hormus. Die Bundesregierung versucht die Kriegspause zu nutzen, um eine globale Wirtschaftskrise abzuwenden und das Verhältnis zu den USA zu reparieren.“, Tagesspiegel 9. 4. 2026, S. 5; (Silence on Trump, waiting at the gas station, helping in Hormuz. The German government is trying to use the lull in the war to avert a global economic crisis and repair relations with the U.S)

This requires resolve. That is lacking in the EU and, in some cases, glaringly so in Germany. Gas prices have risen due to disrupted passage through the Strait of Hormuz. But Germany has a “voter-based” democracy. Nuances of “luxury and habitual rights” have long required that the framework conditions for consumers be realistically defined. Only the poor are hit hard; enshrining fair support for them in law costs little and is decades overdue. For everyone else, it would be economically and ecologically beneficial to, for example, reverse the commuter allowance: the farther one drives, the less one should be able to deduct for tax purposes. This could create incentives to seek jobs near one’s place of residence or to switch to more environmentally friendly modes of transportation. It could reduce dependence on energy suppliers and disruptions to supply, such as those from Iran.

This is not happening; instead, through the usual “chronic symptom relief,” German governments repeatedly find themselves in avoidable crises. From an economic perspective, these are violations of basic economic principles, with the conclusion¹¹:

“It is a complete mystery to me why politicians believe they cannot expect people to accept changes that create many benefits.”

Driven by the power of immediate frustration, Ukrainian housewives manage to “tinker” together usable and effective drones at home, accompanied by high technical quality. Germany has military rearmament too, but in its usual perfectionist - that is, in an essentially unaffordable - form.

Germany’s “democracy of customary rights” is also fatal when it comes to dealing with Iran. German voters have become accustomed to political parties pandering to their bad habits. Positive change is hardly possible under such circumstances. Such democracies do not belong among the countries that are specifically rational and strong in the face of modernization - yet there is constant complaining about China’s effectiveness in setting parameters.

As for Iran, we would be much freer as soon as we stop wasting energy¹² :

“Never in the history of humanity has there been a more inefficient means of transportation. But all this complaining is useless: Germans love their cars, and so do German women.

But if we must accept this waste of space and materials, then at least not for free. Cars should - an age-old demand of urban planners! - be taxed not only based on their motorized power, but also on the materials used to build them and the airspace they occupy while parking. And heavily so. I’ll bet anything: Cars would very quickly become sleeker in design and smaller.”

Soon, an ecologically sensible car would be perfectly suited as a status symbol for Germans, whereas a flashy, heavy vehicle would hardly be so. That way, trucks should remain affordable for industry, but the conditions for long-distance travel should set new standards, especially also for airplanes, and particularly regarding the transport of food or vacationers traveling despite, or even during crises.

Our military buildup is substantial. It may contribute to security, and/or it may soon lead to chaos, as in Ukraine and Iran. Our society should actually become more resilient to both eventualities. But when it comes to heating, resilience isn’t a priority. I

¹¹ Claudia Kemfert in: Jan Krüßmann: „Die Autobauer müssen endlich zur Besinnung kommen – Fossile Energien seien eine Kostenfalle für die Verbraucher, warnt die Ökonomin Claudia Kemfert. Der Preisanstieg an den Tankstellen werde bald auch an den Heizungskellern ankommen“, in: Tagesspiegel, 8. 4. 2026, S. 12 f.; (Statement by Claudia Kemfert in: Jan Krüßmann: “Car manufacturers must finally come to their senses—fossil fuels are a cost trap for consumers, warns economist Claudia Kemfert. The price hike at gas stations will soon reach heating bills as well)

¹² Nikolaus Bernau: „Die Blechlawine rollt - Autos müssen schlanker werden“, Tagesspiegel 11. 9. 2025, S. B18; (The tide of steel is rolling—cars must become leaner)

was born in 1938 and remember a time when only one or two rooms in an apartment were heated. In times of crisis, such measures should be easily implemented as needed. Waste should not remain a customary right in a democracy. German youth clearly senses these realities. They know that clear tipping points are being crossed regarding the climate and that strong intervention is needed right now. A weak democracy that gets upset over gas station prices because of Hormus is helpless in this regard. I note this with a certain bitterness regarding our unforgivably weak democracy.

Fundamental Overcoming of Bitterness

The mutual bitterness and resentment - internal within Iran and external toward Iran - has led to a state of paralysis. Contributing to this is the fact that the U.S. and/or Israel could largely and permanently destroy Iran - and behave provocatively accordingly.

What can Iran, what can its opponents, glean from such perceptions? Superficially, this is merely a rhetorical matter of attitude, as one indication among others. But in reality it is overwhelmingly about actual harm and/or crimes and according vividly justified (!) bitterness in response.

As a futurist, I emphasize that in the age of modern media, the focus is on shaping the future politicians who, as children, currently witness massive crimes on a daily basis. This exact opposite of confidence-building measures (CBMs) is happening worldwide, and drastically so in Iran.

Regarding the issue with Iran, there are also attempts there toward a "power politics":

Iran's arbitrariness as a terrorist actor is evident. Worldwide (!), exiles and opponents of all kinds are under threat. After Trump withdrew police protection from former aides such as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, American security agencies warned of their immediate danger from Iran. Thus, Iranian terrorists can be perceived as somehow very much present in the U.S., at least mentally. Right here in Germany, the threat can be terrifyingly present day and night, as reported by Mahtab Qolizadeh, an Iranian journalist who cannot find a job in Germany where she could attempt to shed light on the nature of Iran¹³. Meantime allies such as Hezbollah and Hamas can be supported by Iran with ever-diminishing effectiveness.

As a conventional military power, Iran's options have been limited by Israel's offensive dominance. Iran's true potential is unknown, and for a long time, it has been deliberately avoided to test it. Above all, Iran fears the destruction of its own nuclear facilities. Its own conventional arsenal has been for a long time considered obsolete, and operational only at relatively short ranges.

But as 2026 reveals, Iran's resilience is unexpectedly high. Many experts misjudged this. The Iranian people are the ones who suffer. Above all, their "resilience," brutally enforced by their own regime, is high.

All of this has begun to change; Iran was able to sell thousands of drones to Russia. For now, much has been destroyed in Iran. Anyway the U.S.'s military-technical superiority remains high against any adversary.

There is little hope for a viable future for the people of Iran in the near term. This remains true despite the population's admirable resilience, as long as the Iran is manipulated by some form of - frighteningly brutal - violent regime.

¹³ Mahtab Qolizadeh: „Wie die Menschen im Iran den Krieg erleben“, Tagesspiegel 31. 3. 2026, p. 4: (How people in Iran are experiencing the war)

A decisive factor for decades - and one that is becoming increasingly important - is Iran's approach to nuclear armament. Although, the very possession of such weapons makes the country itself an even greater target.

4. Asymmetric violence as bitter self-determination

Iran has long been regarded as a military-strategic problem - for itself and others. Then, with the military strike of June 13, 2025, Israel created a new situation. The massive extent of the damage in Iran was widely reported in the media in June 2025. The main objective was to destroy nuclear weapons production facilities to such an extent that production in Iran would be virtually impossible for at least several years to come. This appears to have been largely successful. The military network responsible for all organization and coordination of military operations - including domestic security forces and the police - was equally devastated. Many prominent leaders were killed in targeted assassinations.

Nevertheless it remains unclear for now to what extent the judiciary, intelligence services, and the state administration in general will be disrupted in the coming years. It also remains unclear for Iran what options Donald Trump will grant with his statement: "Iran must strike a deal before there is nothing left."

Before the war, Iran wanted to negotiate directly with U.S. diplomats "on equal footing" starting in February 2026. There is almost no trust on either side, not even tentatively. The typical posturing of the moment dominates, along with a willingness to take risks. This is happening even though CBMs would be the only chance to avoid enormous damage. CBMs would be a sign of the will to survive.

Confrontation also involves exerting enormous pressure to try to get Iran to cease its support for terrorism, generally worldwide, and particularly in the Middle East. Now, the moral character of those in power in Iran is no better in domestic politics than it is in foreign policy. As a result, the Iranian government is currently endangering itself as never before. It has committed itself to offensive violence against its own population, which it also exercises internally. Resistance is brutally suppressed. There are an increasing number of Iranians, both at home and abroad, who are bitterly affected. The sources of information, including those regarding Iran's behavior toward other states, are far more fake than real and/or even self-critical.

Dictatorial autocracies have little chance of survival in the long run. Unfortunately, research into determining the "tipping point" for the transfer of power to a successor government is only vague; in any case, it is difficult to predict. As the example of Syria shows, virtually all intelligence agencies worldwide can be overwhelmed. Politically, this means - when ideological behavior is taken into account - that politicians rarely assess such tipping points realistically.

It is possible for groups of people to escalate their bitterness to almost immeasurable levels. iz3w (<https://www.iz3w.org/>) regularly reports on global suffering: The focus of current topics in mid-2024 is on "multiple crises" and "genocides"¹⁴.

To promote peaceful change, an exemplary mutual understanding was achieved on the sidelines of the 2024 Munich Security Conference that could point the way forward: Charlotte Knobloch (Central Council of Jews in Germany) spoke with António Guterres (UN). She emphasized the suffering in Israel on October 7, 2023, and in the days that followed, while he described the systematic suffering of the

¹⁴ iz3w / Informationszentrum 3. Welt: "Noch zu reparieren? - Die multiple Krise" (Ausgabe April 2024); und: "Die dunkelste Stunde - Völkermorde" (Ausgabe Juli/Aug. 2024 iz3w / Information Center Third World: "Can It Still Be Fixed? – The Multiple Crisis" (April 2024 issue); and: "The Darkest Hour – Genocides" (July/Aug. 2024 issue)

Palestinians over the past 56 years. Both were deeply committed, respected one another, and demonstrated responsibility with a shared hope for the future! With such awareness, peaceful cooperation is possible at any time. Currently, politicians rarely achieve such a shared understanding of reality.

It comes down to juxtaposing different viewpoints and integrating them in a purposeful way. An example with three aspects: My family had ancestors with Jewish roots, and in memory of the survivors and victims, I feel a sense of solidarity, especially with Israel. As a guest of the Palestinians, in Lebanon, etc., I share their hopes. Since 1964, I have been professionally engaged in conflict resolution, not only in times of war.

Right-wing populism is on the rise. Iran, with its labeling of Israel as "the little Satan," feels somewhat better understood in this context. Numerous politicians worldwide have largely given up hope for an honest, substantive, and grassroots-driven overcoming of antisemitism. This is a great misfortune. It jeopardizes the prospects for local peace, and indeed the chances for future world peace. In Germany in particular, politicians and experts are promoting a widespread and mainstream-funded

"chronic symptom relief."

A typical example is the "Decoding Antisemitism" project at TU Berlin¹⁵: 130,000 user comments from social media have been collected since 2021. The aim is to distinguish whether a comment is a critical remark about Israel or typical antisemitism. In doing so, it may be possible to nuance opinions, or even skillfully debunk one-sided accusations. At best, we in Germany could engage in slightly more precise debates about what should be considered "decent" and what "unspeakable." But the political situation will, by and large, remain as it has been. What is missing are forward-looking proposals for fundamentally helpful regulations.

With this article, I would like to contribute to breaking out of the diplomatic impasse, out of the global low point of all trust. For Israelis, this means also acknowledging the Palestinians and their difficulties. There are causes for the abuses committed by both sides, and these must be objectively identified. For Iran, it means not merely viewing and treating this nation as a deliberately and groundlessly terrorist state.

I am aware that my remarks will initially be difficult for many traumatized Jews to bear. My aim is to reverse the acute rise in anti-Semitism, for Israel's current military policy is creating much bitterness; it is perceived globally and risks further cementing the anti-Semitism that has existed for 2,500 years, rather than dismantling it. . On the other hand, a truly livable survival can only be achieved together with all (!) affected groups. Any end to anti-Semitism is only conceivable with such an approach.

How to Drive Yourself Out of Paradise

Shortly after the founding of the State of Israel, the future could have been steered in a much better direction, for example in the spirit of Ben-Gurion:

"We must be strong and just."

It would not have been wrong to try a model of close cooperation. The fact that it was not even attempted in a diplomatic and respectful manner and on a viable scale is the fault of both the Arabs and Israel. Debates about "who is more to blame" are not only nonsensical; above all, they hinder any resolution of the conflict.

¹⁵ Eva Murasov: "Antisemitismus erkennen - Wie man Aussagen zu Nahost einordnet" Tagesspiegel 31.10.2024, S. B 27 / und decoding-antisemitism.eu (Recognizing Anti-Semitism – How to Interpret Statements on the Middle East, and decoding-antisemitism.eu)

With its modern agricultural technology, Israel could have transformed the entire Middle East region into a paradise! After its founding, Israel was able to increasingly secure its own land use militarily and through police measures up until 2024. At least there were sometimes seemingly constructive negotiations. But they remained tough and made no progress. There was a lack of willingness to trust. The VBMs remained uncertain and hesitant. The seemingly endless back-and-forth of Yasser Arafat's actions and statements regarding violence¹⁶ was also detrimental. While it led to the Nobel Peace Prize, it did not lead to peace. The Arab states refused to integrate Palestinian refugees as part of their own societies. Decades of suffering for those affected are neither a coincidence nor some kind of limited accident - but a widespread catastrophe for which politicians bear responsibility.

In 2019, I wrote¹⁷:

"We Child Survivors know that when 'confidence-building measures' with those in power fail, survival can become as difficult and rare as we have experienced."

When assessing these failures, it is therefore important to understand the extent and nature of the harm and suffering inflicted on people over decades and continuing to this day. Of course, the "3-D Test" provides important information: Suspected antisemitism is tested by observing "delegitimization, demonization, and double standards"¹⁸. Of course, Israel is not committing "unprovoked genocide" - but genocide? There are objective criteria for assessment. The difficult question is what can effectively be done when fighters (terrorists? freedom fighters?) like Hamas operate from schools and hospitals. This question must be examined constantly and with nuance, tirelessly and with the utmost urgency, until a possible resolution to the tragedy is found,

Anti-Semitism, in the form of a subjectively rigid prejudice, was and always is unjust and immoral. In individual cases, everyone can try to assess certain situations and behaviors as well and fairly as possible based on their own perspective. Disputes are often difficult to resolve. What must be consistently and objectively (!) demonstrated is how blatantly anti-Semitism harms both perpetrators and victims. What struck me, for example, during my work as a researcher in 1980 was hard for me to bear. It seemed so absurd to me that after a few days, and again years later, I simply could not believe it and therefore checked it several times. But the result remained correct; here is my brief summary¹⁹:

"The population growth in Egypt over five years was greater than the total population of Israel! And the conflict was over Israel's limited, small territory. Furthermore, the costly military buildup alone had harmful consequences for Egypt that were comparable to a war:

Expensive Mirage aircraft (fighter jets from France) were purchased. The cost of armaments amounted to the equivalent of DM 30,000 per soldier. But there was only one teacher for an average of 78 students and practically no teaching materials. Very young students had to search the fields for pests for a day in exchange for the equivalent of 10 cents. They were driven to work by

¹⁶ https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jassir_Arafat

¹⁷ Philipp Sonntag: "Forever Alert - Child Survivors in Action Before 1945 and Beyond 2019," (Beggerow, Berlin; 2019; 240 pages); out of print, but available for free download at www.philipp-sonntag.de/foreveralert, p. 155

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Ds_of_antisemitism

¹⁹ Philipp Sonntag: "Aspekte einer Anwendung von statistischen Rechenverfahren auf Rüstungsausgaben, S. 147. In: Rüstung und Ökonomie (Hrsg. Ph. Sonntag), Haag und Herchen, Frankfurt, (1982); (Aspects of the Application of Statistical Methods to Military Expenditures)

older students wielding whips. All students were exposed to vermin and epidemics without any medical assistance.

In response, some agreements were indeed reached between Egypt and Israel, such as certain arms limitations and a somewhat reduced willingness to escalate on the part of both states. However, the violence in the Middle East was not overcome. The costs of this failure are currently visible every day in the global media.

The misery in Egypt remains stark in 2024: Population growth remains high and has reached 110 million people. The Nile is heavily polluted; plants and fish barely thrive anymore. Millions of impoverished families live on very small wooden boats and are exposed to disease and poisoning. Their children have no chance of attending school. Furthermore, substantial military spending continues to cement the misery that could have been avoided through cooperation.

Preventive violence destroys security and perpetuates misery

Before 1948, the Arabs in Palestine had hardly any political power. But they had a simple, barren, yet very precious homeland. Their pent-up, repeatedly emphasized bitterness is directly linked to their behavior as perpetrators, right up to the atrocities of October 7, 2023. It may “explain” the violence to some extent, but it can never justify unlawful acts, and it will hardly ever be effective.

For Israelis as victims, this means that it is dangerously dishonest to view the violence of October 7, 2023, as terrorism out of nowhere, without acknowledging the earlier history and their own, much-described terrorism. Remarkably, it would also be important to fundamentally acknowledge how tragic the period since 1948 must have been for Palestinians. Any justification of one’s own “counter-terrorism” following October 7, 2023, violates established international law.

Conversely, for Palestinians, this development means that it is just as dangerously dishonest to believe that past suffering “permits” actions outside the scope of international law. “Taking the law into one’s own hands” may be a Wild West romanticism, but it is not productive, and by no means effective. Both parties will be harmed by the growing bitterness far into the future.

The Jewish bitterness after 2,500 years of anti-Semitism and ultimately the Holocaust must be understood and respected. But it cannot “explain” why Israel’s intention to destroy Hamas is so stubbornly maintained. Nor does it seem to be effective overall. For this is happening even though it is clearly evident how many future terrorists (later called Hamas or by another name) are growing up among the Palestinian children in Gaza. There will be more of them than Israel can kill now and/or in the future. This is a real and absurd tragedy! This applies quite similarly at the moment to the war waged by Israel and the U.S. against Iran.

It is clear how such a process leads to a global consolidation of anti-Semitism. This is happening above all among young people, including “pro-Palestinian” students at German universities. For another 2,500 years? A purely mechanical insistence on “German *raison d’état*” can only exacerbate the disaster. Even in political science, which of course should have been objective, there were failures.

If only “reparations” after 1945 had been honest, and if former Nazis had been kept out of government agencies, then “German *raison d’état*” could well have succeeded - sensibly, with a sense of proportion, and - yes - even with goodwill. Sound regulation, with far less anti-Semitism, would have been possible. An indication of just how tangled the situation is becomes clear in the “necessity” of now having to

“call in” police officers (!) in the midst of a democracy to protect Jews and Jewish arguments at events at universities.

After all, Iran’s relationship with Israel could change drastically in the not-too-distant future due to new, as yet barely foreseeable technical advances in the development and control of weapons and weapon systems. This is already evident in the inexpensive drones built in Iran that are being sold as far as Russia; this changes the arms landscape not only economically but also militarily. While an “Iron Dome” (as in Israel) with high-quality defensive weapons may remain helpful for the time being, it is becoming increasingly prohibitively expensive. If Israel loses its superiority, the resentment of the surrounding nations could backfire enormously and threaten its very existence. For now, however, Israel has ensured - through the extreme destruction of infrastructure and companies in Iran - that any production in Iran has been significantly hampered and delayed.

Public Concern and Motivation

Spontaneous concern is a current global challenge, also relevant to Europe’s behavior toward countries like Iran. Only by ensuring the Iranians’ self-determination as a society can a fundamental liberation for the state and its people - acceptable even to us in Europe - be achieved there.

Many autocrats can delay the tipping point of their power. Often effective is a close interlinking of direct brutal violence - such as ruthless “police,” thug squads from “secret services,” and Revolutionary Guards - which have nothing to do with social revolutions or even reforms

with indirect, bureaucratic violence, such as “legal” protection for criminal perpetrators, through surveillance, infrastructure, and the deliberate impoverishment and disempowerment of the population.

Those affected are usually fully aware of the consequences, with a keen sense of the specific hardships they face. A brief overview from four anonymous individuals affected, after one month of war²⁰ :

- “1. Report from the emergency room of a city hospital: military casualties are taken to military hospitals, not to us in the civilian sector. We’ve had to postpone many scheduled surgeries. Many of our doctors have fled. Commuting has become very dangerous for our staff.
2. A supermarket employee: Everyone is buying only the bare essentials, such as soy instead of meat. I believe the leadership of the Islamic Republic is waging this war in such a way that everyone loses as much as possible.
3. A bazaar vendor: The middle class has been hit particularly hard. Most have effectively become poor. The greatest fear here in the area is that Trump might still get involved with the clerical establishment for some reason, that all the hopes we’ve clung to - through hardship - were in vain. And whether you’re an opponent of the government, a supporter of the war, or a regime loyalist, for everyone it feels harder than it did before the war.
- 4., a programmer: The worst part of commuting is the checkpoints. The soldiers are brutal and ruthless; they shoot at people without any restraint. The killing of security chief Ali Larijani has deeply satisfied and encouraged many of us. Members of the paramilitary Basij militia are patrolling residential neighborhoods and shooting at houses because residents are shouting

²⁰ Mahtab Qolizadeh: „Wie die Menschen im Iran den Krieg erleben“, Tagesspiegel 31. 3. 2026, S. 4 (How People in Iran Experience the War)

slogans from their windows. And every time, it leaves me with deep anger and fear that are almost impossible to put into words.”

As early as February 28, 2026 - one day earlier than Trump had announced - the war by the U.S. and Israel against Iran began. Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei did not survive this first day. Yet politically, he is unlikely to become a martyr.

This is evident in the bitterness of the protesting population. Despite deep mourning at the funerals of the regime's victims, people there cheered, sang, and danced. It stemmed from joy over the regime's upheaval brought about by their own courage, over self-created hope for a long-overdue regime change - fundamentally over their own, fully conscious and unambiguous martyrdom.

It is surprising that the war is by no means over at the end of March, after a month. At the same time, the population's dismay shows that they must continually reassess their own hopes with a sense of disillusionment, despite very different attitudes.

Background: The population's attitude became clear right at the start of the war, on the evening of February 28, 2026: I was able to participate in an online meeting of the “Human Rights Association for Migrants e.V.”, led by Pari Rahmani, the “Director of Human Rights Aid Projects in Iran.” There was a unanimous desire to overcome both the current regime and the former regime of the Shah, and to work together toward their own form of democracy - or at least self-determination - . True self-determination can then, in Iran's own best interest, prevent any support for terrorists.

What was particularly moving during the online meeting were the many experiences shared by those affected who had been subjected to the violence of autocratic regimes. As an editor, I have overseen a series of books containing accounts from those affected (not from Iran, but from other regions) - a demanding task - and have noted my impressions²¹:

I am confident that the accounts shared at the online meeting on February 28, 2026, are authentic and credible, including observations of the behavior of autocrats by the highly traumatized victims. The suffering was evident:

Many migrants reported suffering within their own families, executions, and missing persons; the suffering of very many young people, especially children and adolescents

There were statements from eyewitnesses such as: “I am 90 years old and still suffer from the injuries inflicted on me as a young person through torture.”

It is often women who desperately search for missing family members - often their husbands, often minors - and courageously organize public protests.

Furthermore, during the online meeting, statements such as the following were made:

We do not want a dictatorship: neither one with sandals and a turban, nor one with boots.

We need support from abroad - but not from Israel and the U.S., because they pursue their own interests

Historians reported on centuries of persecution of pioneers of Iranian self-determination, for example in the context of the French Revolution of 1789.

My recommendation was well-received at the online meeting to view Reza Pahlavi's options in the context of what “Trump allows him to do” and what “Trump tasks him

²¹ Philipp Sonntag: „Erinnerungskultur – Die gesellschaftliche Rolle von Zeitzeugen“, Frank & Timme Verlag, Berlin (2023); (Culture of Remembrance – The Social Role of Eyewitnesses)

with,” all in the interest of “deals” that further cement the impoverishment of the Iranian population.

Trump skillfully emphasizes points such as: “As long as Iran supports terrorists in the Middle East, he would do everything to prevent any nuclear armament by Iran.” In fact, attempts by autocrats in Iran are based on the delusion that civilian nuclear power is profitable and useful, and that military nuclear armament makes Iran invulnerable. Now, one can certainly buy all kinds of technology at a high price, but only if one cannot effectively build systematic, state-of-the-art command structures with it. This makes one increasingly a target oneself, much like the acute situation in the conventional realm.

Among the turbulent ambivalences following yesterday’s attack are reports such as the one on <https://www.zdfheute.de/politik/ausland/iran-israel-usa-angriff-liveblog-100.html>: “Russian President Vladimir Putin criticizes the killing of Iranian religious leader Ali Khamenei as a ‘cynical violation’ of all norms of human morality and international law.”

The historical development has been known in detail and extensively researched over millennia and should be taken into account. As for the characters of those in power, the spectrum has always been as broad as in Europe. As is already clear from Thucydides’ **The Peloponnesian War** (Reclam, repeatedly reprinted), Persia was a superpower 2,500 years ago, with all the positive and negative characteristics of such a power - and due astonishment at the first stirrings of democracy in Athens.

5. Nuclear armament as the extreme form of self-endangerment

For decades, Iran - viewed as highly problematic - has been regarded as a potential nuclear power capable of providing its own deterrent. This situation has become acutely more severe in the wake of technological advances (which are generally available worldwide but effectively out of Iran’s reach) and the war. Had Iran perhaps waited too long to carry out a demonstrative nuclear explosion in order to prevent an Israeli attack preemptively? For deterrence, such a demonstration would be insufficient - and could even trigger a war - to preemptively prevent a nuclear power with the associated capabilities?

Many investments in Iran would need to be examined more closely in this regard due to the nuclear aspect. For instance, missiles are being developed that appear significant for a nuclear power in the long term; while they do not enable conventional warfare for Iran, they do allow for limited, targeted, demonstrative operations. Over the past ten years, target guidance has become increasingly precise, and the missiles have also become more maneuverable in flight. Their ranges extend up to 2,000 km; they would take less than ten minutes to strike the territory of Israel, carrying approximately 750 kg of conventional explosives. Missile defense systems are expensive, and the interaction between them is difficult to assess.

Even the best intelligence service cannot uncover what the enemy’s engineers themselves do not know. What it sometimes recommends in such dead-ends is to “destroy as much of the enemy’s infrastructure as possible!” Depending on the situation, intelligence services can cause problems just as easily as they can resolve them.

As far as their own nuclear arsenals are concerned, Iran and Germany have been treated in remarkably similar ways since the middle of the last century: Hitler was under no circumstances to be allowed a monopoly on nuclear weapons. And even today, the former Allies (Truman, Stalin, Churchill, and de Gaulle at the time) remain united: Germany must under no circumstances possess its own nuclear weapons.

This applies both rationally and emotionally. Egon Bahr repeatedly emphasized and reaffirmed that both aspects remain valid; I heard this myself during one of his lectures shortly before his death in 2015.

Most nations are similarly adamant in their rejection of Iran's nuclear armament. Emotionally, this is largely based on fear of Iran's high propensity for terrorism; among the vague yet intense fears is that allies (such as Hamas and Hezbollah) could gain access to nuclear weapons. However, from a purely technical standpoint, such a development remains a distant prospect.

Iran is technically difficult to assess and politically almost impossible to control as a potential nuclear power

Iran is - whether only potentially for now or already for some time - a peculiar potential nuclear power in its unusual nature, and thus difficult to assess. Technical shortcomings could lead to "unforeseen" damage against a backdrop of bitter animosity. We must not overlook the fact that Iran must be viewed and treated as a potentially effective nuclear power, one based on highly enriched uranium and possibly special radioactive waste for "dirty bombs" designed to spread radioactivity. Both are unsuitable for nuclear reactors as well as for the construction of nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, Iran demonstrates a technical capability as if it were a concrete option. In doing so, both the government and Iran as a whole, along with its population, are putting themselves at risk. For example, Iran may be focusing on "dirty bombs." These would be ideally suited for terror and panic, with manageable effort.

Yet Iran itself is highly vulnerable to radioactive fallout. Bitterness could lead to completely senseless attacks. Given the apparent weakness in the current war, this reality should also be clear in Iran and lead to restraint. Above all: As soon as radioactivity were brought into Israel and spread there, there would be a great danger that Israel would use its own nuclear weapons in Iran - and thus the most important global taboo would be broken.

One hope could be that while Israel has caused enormous material damage with its acute attack on Iran, it has killed comparatively few people in Iran - and has avoided the spread of radioactivity.

American MOAB bombs and other high-tech conventional bombs, which strike with greater precision than ever before, destroy Iran's laboratories and production facilities. Radioactive fallout can cause all manner of damage, on a scale that is practically - and thus politically - difficult to control. If panic were to break out within its own borders, the Iranian government would have to reckon with a revolution.

By comparison, despite its military and technological strength, Israel is a small, narrow country that is also highly vulnerable to radioactive radiation. This is true even though Israel has the world's best civil defense system, which is consciously and purposefully organized; the threat is known and confronted. Meanwhile, Iran, on the other hand, remains largely unprepared, and its infrastructure - especially its population - is comparatively highly vulnerable.

Challenges in Current Attempts at Arms and Violence Control

Eight of the nine de facto nuclear-weapon states have heightened their awareness during the construction of their nuclear bombs, whether regarding the extent of damage, the risks of escalation, the risks of accidents, etc. The exception is North Korea, which emphasizes the risks in an almost provocative manner. Iran is assessed as potentially similarly dangerous. No single country in the world has

responded adequately to the fact that nuclear arms control has become significantly more difficult over the decades, both technically and organizationally.

It is hard to imagine how a potential future nuclear-armed state like Iran would behave - whether in response to the long-felt forms of existential threats, particularly in the event of a military attack as Trump has threateningly announced.

We would have to explain to ourselves and the EU how all nine (!) nuclear powers, after beginning their nuclear armament, were genuinely alarmed, and more safety oriented than before as societies who had to confront new, technically “unforeseen” dangers. That is now a thing of the past; all nine are attempting to “modernize” their nuclear arsenals, with new risks of escalation. Our tradition in Germany is different. We certainly enjoy a special standing among most of the 193 UN member states because the “18 Göttingen nuclear physicists” refused to build nuclear weapons - in 1957, contrary to the intentions of Konrad Adenauer and Franz Josef Strauß.

In one respect, I fundamentally differ from many (perhaps all) experts on the Middle East: Germany provided Israel and Iran with many technical details for nuclear armament. Franz Josef Strauß ensured that state-of-the-art technology was supplied to both countries for the development of nuclear armaments. Thus, companies, research institutes, and government agencies were optimally prepared for a completely different goal to which Franz Josef Strauß had been deeply committed for years: the development of a German nuclear arsenal, including delivery systems. The high classification of secrecy regarding everything related to weapons and Israel was helpful in this regard - though ultimately unsuccessful: The “Göttingen 18 Nuclear Scientists”²² prevented the construction of a German nuclear weapon.

Germany should have long ago explained to Israel, as one friend to another, that it is breeding far more future fighters (terrorists, freedom fighters, mercenaries, etc.) than it could ever kill. We Germans should explain to Iran how the “nuclear weapon” fetish, if realized, could massively increase its own vulnerability. During the Cold War, our nuclear sharing arrangement with nuclear weapons in Büchel was, for a long time, almost reassuring. At least to our pilots, the “2016 White Paper on Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr” still naively explained, in essence: “Don’t worry, nothing will happen; it’s just a deterrent, and Russia knows NATO’s superiority.” Today, the delivery systems are technically obsolete. And in the new NATO member states of Finland and Sweden, a heated debate is underway: “Have we now become new targets in a nuclear war?”

The same applies to Iran: there, attempts to build its own nuclear arsenal are already making the country a target for major attacks. The greatest threat to the state itself and its population comes precisely from the most modern weapons, which carry the potential for escalation. It is an ethical dead end.

For the government in Washington Kenneth Boulding investigated the dynamics of “nuclear war games” on a computer, on behalf dangers for USA²³. That is similar to what I did in Hamburg for the FRG from 1964 to 1972, and we had similar impressions. Kenneth Boulding summed up this new ethical dilemma “It was not the ethics of Achilles and Hector to press a button and burn thousands of children alive.”

6. Variations of local dominance in Iran

Given the circumstances, a wide variety of political systems are, in principle, conceivable in Iran. Even a question like “When is change conceivable?” is almost

²² https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/G%C3%B6ttinger_Achtzehn

²³ Kenneth Boulding: “National Defense through stable peace”, IIASA 1983, 38 p.

impossible to answer. But distinguishing between options and threats and striving for what is desirable is feasible. It is as real as it is passionate.

6.1 Revolutionary Guards, even “without a government”

When an autocratic regime falls, there is always a pressing question: How will the former “security forces” behave? For the most part, they were known to be violent and, in many cases, brutal. They are often largely absorbed by the new, succeeding regime. However, if the new regime is not autocratic but, at least initially, open to liberal structures, former “security forces” may face an existential problem: they might be brought to trial, and convicted.

Given all this, it may be a viable option for them to seek to seize power themselves. How this might be attempted always depends on other spheres of influence within, and upon the country. For example: Can one come to terms with the existing judiciary, with the clergy, with the customs and interests of the business community - and, above all, with external interests and powers? For instance: If a deal is struck with Trump, will there still be enough oil revenue available for their own needs? What kind of deal regarding the acquisition and domestic production of weapons is feasible?

6.2 Clerical fascism, firmly entrenched in a fundamentalist dead end

In 1979, well-organized Iranian Islamists seized power in Iran. They succeeded in filling key positions and establishing the “Islamic Republic of Iran” according to their vision. This was preceded by the Shah’s removal from power and flight. Students - some secular, some politically left-leaning - had contributed significantly to this. But the new rulers killed thousands of “heretics.” This is a phenomenon that continues to persist bitterly, but one that cannot be ruled out even with potential autocratic successors to clerical fascism.

Officially, Iran has always adhered to UN human rights treaties. Yet the widely known violations of key provisions have long led to fierce resistance against the regime. But it is precisely through this brutality that the regime has been able to remain in power - so far (as of early April 2026).

6.3 Return of a Shah-style regime, with significant intervention by external nations; (e.g., Reza Pahlavi / Donald Trump)

Officially, Iran has always adhered to the UN human rights treaties.

But even the Shah ruled autocratically, banned opposition parties, and had regime opponents persecuted, imprisoned, and tortured by his secret service (SAVAK, also active in Germany).

The close ties to the U.S. and the support for the Shah for geostrategic reasons (against the Soviet Union) made him, in the eyes of many Iranians, a puppet of the West. This has not been forgotten to this day,

Reza Pahlavi is highly controversial. He has never presented a plan for a possible form of democracy in Iran, similar to that of Montesquieu. He has not founded any group or party in the U.S. from which his own views on the exercise of power following a coup might be heard.

The media, mostly clueless about what was at stake, were interested in Reza Pahlavi as a novelty and a show-off on talk shows.

In contrast, the demand for women's rights - Reza Pahlavi seemed to have taken no notice of this. When Reza Pahlavi was interviewed by the British-Iranian journalist Amanpour (whom I know from CNN to be convincingly objective), he became abusive and insulting - typical of autocrats. In Iran, there were shop owners who had refused to display slogans like "one country, one flag, one leader." He was at a loss as to whether he should stand by them or dismiss them as fake propaganda from his opponents. And on television, there were images purporting to show Reza Pahlavi leading protesters during demonstrations abroad. Typical fake "cheerleaders" were shown, fitting in with the earlier adulation of Soraya in the rainbow press. His call to protest in Iran despite the high risk was also viewed critically, with the remark: "Help is on the way." Likewise, his demand that "in the first hundred days, all the strings must be in his hands" and that he would prepare "democracy."

As the situation in Iran is constantly changing, especially during the weeks of the war in March 2026, both attitudes toward and perceptions of Reza Pahlavi are also constantly shifting accordingly. One example is Shirin Ebadi's involvement; for her, Reza Pahlavi is a key figure, possibly a temporary political catalyst for whom there is currently no alternative, and whom she believes will be capable of relinquishing power at the decisive moment of transition²⁴ :

Tessa Szyszkowitz's question: "You work very closely with Reza Pahlavi, the son of the former Shah. For some, he is a beacon of hope; for others, he represents the old Shah regime, which was also repressive. What is your stance on Reza Pahlavi?"

Shirin Ebadi's response: "There are Iranians who support the monarchy. There are republicans who oppose him. What is important is that Pahlavi has stated he will assume leadership of the movement during the transitional phase. After the end of the Islamic regime, this leadership is intended to pave the way for holding a referendum.

This referendum will take place under UN supervision. Pahlavi has promised that this referendum will determine whether a republic or a monarchy should be established in Iran. If the people choose the republic, he will step down.

The people who advocate for a republic are against the regime and also against the monarchy. But in these 47 years, they have not managed to appoint anyone as the leader of the opposition. There is no candidate to lead the transitional phase."

What, in fact, could a transition phase - one that is virtually impossible to plan - possibly mean here? Can, should, or must one trust Reza Pahlavi? Who, exactly, is "one"? Not least of all, he himself. It may be, for example, that he starts out "sincere," only to be confronted with unforeseen challenges. He is familiar with a state system that was, at least temporarily, internally coherent: namely, his father's regime. Within it, he knows a multitude of roles, from fighter pilots to intelligence agents, from perpetrators to victims of all kinds. But where was his father too harsh - - or not harsh enough? How could, how should coordination with segments of the civilian population develop, particularly with returning exiles?

²⁴ Shirin Ebadi im Interview von Tessa Szyszkowitz: „Und dann komme nicht nur ich, dann kommen wir alle zurück – Die Exil-Iranerin und Friedensnobelpreisträgerin Shirin Ebadi über Trumps Krieg, den Kampf gegen das Regime und den Grund, warum sie mit Schah-Sohn Reza Pahlavi kooperiert. Tagesspiegel 1. 4. 2026, Seite 12 Shirin Ebadi in an interview with Tessa Szyszkowitz: "And Then It Won't Just Be Me, We'll All Come Back—Exiled Iranian and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Shirin Ebadi on Trump's War, the Struggle Against the Regime, and the Reason She Cooperates with the Shah's Son, Reza Pahlavi)

6.4 An attempt at rule by the people, despite an initial lack of structures (Montesquieu), toward a form of democracy

A self-determination that is as democratic as possible is strongly sought after by large segments of the population in Iran. The same is true for Iranians in exile. Self-determination must be flexible and resilient in order to establish and protect itself. To achieve this, it requires ongoing updates across a wide range of institutions. Ideally, this should involve continuous modern renewal in multiple respects - be it legally, in terms of mindset, technically in IT and media, as well as being effectively networked globally and visibly active locally²⁵.

All of this must be completely rebuilt in Iran. There is a high level of awareness of this both internally and externally, as well as the education and, in some cases, the experience required to put it into practice. It must be established in a resilient manner. This means that a "perfect" judicial system, modeled after the German Basic Law, could be proclaimed by a regime, but if it is not accepted, it will quickly be lost through violence, whether by the Revolutionary Guards, a secret service, the police, or the military. That would be the end of any form of self-determination.

A judge or a prosecutor must be protected against arbitrariness of any kind in order to carry out their duties. In fact, the global rise of right-wing populists, combined with unscrupulous autocrats, means that more democracies are currently disappearing than are emerging.

Germany has vast experience in this regard, particularly in dealing with existential threats. Anyone who wants to do something to counter the threat to our democracy must be wide awake and on high alert. They can and should take real lessons from how the Nazis seized power in 1933 and expanded it unlawfully. Above all, however, they must look at how this type of "survivor" brazenly mutated from old Nazis into neo-Nazis without even calling themselves Nazis anymore. How they continued to be entrenched in key positions "by society" after 1945. This could and should have been prevented after 1945.

Nazis held positions of power until 1945, for example as judges, prosecutors, or economists, very often with dire consequences. Yet under Adenauer, especially after 1955, many managed to make their way back into government offices and ministries, spanning the judiciary, executive, and legislative branches. A similar danger exists in Iran, where members of the Revolutionary Guards, legal officials, intelligence agents, etc., might be absorbed into a new state - but not held accountable. All of this occurred alongside many who were, at their core, genuine democrats, yet lost the power struggle against the growing violence of the Nazis.

For Ahmed al-Scharaa, the new ruler in Syria, developing stable structures for a people in need of unification is an unprecedented challenge. Despite his extensive experience in dealing with violence, including terrorism, he is struggling to keep rival groups in Syria in check. Exiles and returnees to their own country are finding it extremely difficult to promote, let alone build, democratic structures. As German Foreign Minister Wadephul noted, they - - are initially facing enormous problems simply surviving amidst the destruction and temporary chaos.

All of this applies accordingly to Iran - and to many of the 193 nations of the United Nations. After all, the UN represents a kind of collective consciousness of humanity regarding its situation.

²⁵ Philipp Sonntag: „Demokratie befreien und resilient etablieren“, in: Blickpunkt Zukunft (Hrsg. Werner Mittelstaedt), März 2026, 46. Jahrgang, S. 7-11, <https://www.blickpunkt-zukunft.com/> ("Liberating Democracy and Establishing Resilience")

It is admirable, in the wake of the war against Iran, during the ceasefire and with an uncertain future, to show confidence in one's own strength despite everything and to soberly recognize the weaknesses of the aggressors²⁶ :

“Many Iranians cling to the hope that the war will topple the mullah regime in Tehran. Should the government ultimately survive, the people would not forgive the U.S. ...

Since the start of the U.S. and Israeli attacks, the Iranian community in Berlin has been fearing for the safety of parents, siblings, and friends back home. The U.S. president's threats and the bombings overshadow everyday worries. Nevertheless, many cling to the hope that this very escalation will destabilize the regime in Tehran and ultimately make a different, freer future possible for the country. ...

Gholizadeh speaks of a kind of martial law prevailing in the cities: armed forces are stationed on the streets, stopping people and checking bags and cell phones. The space for civil society action has shrunk once again. “Several demonstrators have been executed in recent days,” she says. “And if the leadership in Tehran gets the impression that the shadow of war is receding, even harsher measures are to be expected.”

Yet the journalist does not sound despairing. “I am unreservedly hopeful,” she writes. Iran has a long tradition of pro-democracy movements dating back to 1905. “Given our history, I am certain that Iran deserves a liberal democracy - and that it will come.” The only open question is when.

As an exiled journalist in Berlin, she does not feel separated from the people in Iran: “We no longer want this shameful, terrorist regime.”

When the ceasefire was announced, “a certain sense of relief” was initially felt in the community in Berlin, Nowzari says. The fear of a massive bombardment had subsided. But another question quickly came to the forefront: What is happening now inside the country?

“I fear that the regime now has free rein to take revenge on opposition figures - just as it did after the Iran-Iraq War,” he says. He is particularly alarmed by a speech by the head of the Iranian judiciary. According to Nowzari, the latter called on judges to carry out death sentences against arrested demonstrators more quickly.”

7. Iran's search for a new identity, amid reforms by the global community and the United Nations that remain utopian for now

The United Nations was founded for a peaceful future. The drama unfolding in Iran is a prime example of the challenges facing all 193 UN member states. At stake are, for now, utopian reforms of the global community of shared destiny, particularly the UN.

According to the UN Charter, every nation should have a moral veto, and use it against all and any violation of human rights. . The veto applies to every people, to all minorities - as in Syria in 2026 - and it applies to every mother worldwide, including in Iran. As long as this veto is ignored, the so-called rulers, the autocrats

²⁶ Henning Onken: Henning Onken: „Iraner über die Waffenruhe im Nahen Osten - Mahtab Gholizadeh und Hamid Nowzari erklären, warum die letzte Hoffnung der iranischen Diaspora in Berlin bei der Zivilgesellschaft liegt“, Tagesspiegel 10. 4. 2026, S. B4; (“Iranians on the Ceasefire in the Middle East—Mahtab Gholizadeh and Hamid Nowzari Explain Why the Last Hope of the Iranian Diaspora in Berlin Lies with Civil Society)

worldwide, will continue to face difficulties, and even more so within their own societies. Every body is covered, even that of the “respectable pharmacist Assad.” But every soul is naked. Any autocrat who could even begin to sense this would instantly drop dead from shame, horror, and humiliating powerlessness.

All of this began with the blossoming of humanity. It has always included quite a few “rotten fruits” - that is, countless tortured victims. One of the first to clearly articulate this veto was Thucydides, both morally and with goal-oriented pragmatism. Back then, 2,500 years ago, Iran was a culturally flourishing great power. Then as now, we are in a preliminary stage of civilization. Thucydides saw this. I suspect he already sensed that no wolf in a proud wolf pack is as blatantly stupid as man. He sensed and named the countless enemies of the Athenians in their internal contradictions, in their animalistically spontaneous, virtually free-spirited readiness for battle. Shortly before the end of Book Seven (followed only by a brief Book Eight: “Impact in Athens”) of his work “The Peloponnesian War” (reclam 1966), a widely typical end to the war becomes clear:

“When countless corpses were already piled one upon another in the river and the army had been destroyed - part of it in the river, the other part, if some managed to escape, by the horsemen - Nicias surrendered to Gylippus, whom he trusted more than the Syracusans; the Spartans were to do with him as they pleased, but were not to continue slaughtering the other soldiers. ... The people in the quarries treated the Syracusans very cruelly in the early days. ... (I will spare the reader certain details).”

The final words in Book Seven of Thucydides’ work:

“This was certainly the greatest undertaking of all in this war; in my opinion, even of all those we know from Hellenic history - bringing glorious fame to the victors, and deepest sorrow to the vanquished. ... Only a few of so many returned home.”

After all, which autocrat today would have as much courage and insight as Nicias? In 1979, the Shah of Persia fled to the U.S. Did he take a few million dollars in boxes with him? No, everything had long since been settled electronically. In the midst of the “rule-based” world. What might help is a financial system systematically controlled by AI, thereby fully transparent. Kenneth Boulding²⁷ emphasized credibility is essential for CBM, noting: the more power someone has, the more lack of credibility (that is, lies) he can afford - after all, nothing will be verified. He meant:

“If you cannot test something, it has a strong tendency to persist, whereas if you can test things, then they tend to be tested, and that is the end of them - . There are some very interesting questions related to this in the international system, where the breakdown of the credibility of a threat often triggers a war, as in 1914. The uncertainty created by secrecy is another source of the pathological behavior of the international system. ... I have often argued that the United Nations ought to have a spying agency that spies on everyone and publishes the results immediately. This would enormously increase security ...”

Did Trump read that? If you want to swear well, you have to pay close attention in religion class. If you don’t want to stand out as a terrorist - not least in Germany - you have to have thoroughly learned and internalized the forms of “being bourgeois.”

²⁷ Kenneth Boulding: “National Defense through stable peace”, IIASA 1983, p. 5)

7.1 Tools of Conflict Resolution under International Law, by Johan Galtung

Iran's state terrorism, along with the support it receives from all sides (e.g., Hezbollah, not prevented by the Lebanese state), constitutes effective genocide and is contrary to international law. Bitterness is the driving force. A global lack of education and justice cements the failure to overcome this impasse. The task of the United Nations was and remains to call the autocrats to order. But global consciousness is more sick than healthy.

We in Germany are comparatively less affected, through only by rather because private and/or individual terrorism. We are less affected because Iran's state terrorism, with its more than thousands of deaths, doesn't reach us. In contrast, private terrorism – even when instigated or supported by Iran – is, from a political and social perspective, more of a media spectacle. After all, Iran can create a certain degree of political panic with individual victims, usually fewer than ten. Although those few affected are certainly to be pitied locally, such as the victims of a car accident. Victims by private terrorism occur by far less frequent in comparison to car accidents. Private terrorism usually affects one to ten people, rarely more than a hundred. State terrorism often affects over a million people, with a global total of altogether well over a billion victims.

In the war between Iran, Israel, and the U.S., all three states are constantly violating international law. The motives are what matter. Put simply, the U.S. is concerned with oil, Israel with preventive self-defense, and Iran with defense through asymmetric warfare - for all three, using targeted terrorist actions as “necessary.” And it is about “nuclear parity.” Johan Galtung wrote on this subject at²⁸ :

“... it is difficult to see why Iran should be subject to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty when Israel, India, and Pakistan have gotten away with enriching their uranium to weapons-grade levels. This means the U.S. would have to fundamentally revise its policy toward Israel and India, as it did in 1962 during the Cuban Missile Crisis when it withdrew its missiles from Turkey in return.”

And Galtung listed a wealth of further suggestions on both sides (as early as 2006), identifying difficulties while simultaneously emphasizing reconciliation; in short, for example:

He explains the “spiritual poverty of the West” by the fact that fundamental violations of international law are assessed quite one-sidedly depending on “friend-and-foe” thinking and action (!).

He lists many U.S. objectives, such as achieving regime change in Iran as in 1953, “perhaps also to reinstate the Shah’s family, again assuming that the Iranians will accept this.” Furthermore, the fear that “control will pass from the U.S. and Israel to Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas, and radical Shiite Islam.” Another goal is “ensuring that Iranian oil is available at affordable prices.” Furthermore, the “encirclement of Russia and China with military bases” is to be further completed, etc. Galtung refers to all of these as “subtexts”; as the official text, he cites the goal: “to rule out any possibility of Iran producing nuclear weapons.” ...

Conversely, Iran emphasizes in particular the right under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to enrich uranium to industrial levels, e.g., to diversify its

²⁸ Johan Galtung: “Reconciliation of the U.S. and the U.K. with Iran—A Peace and Conflict Perspective” (April 2006), published in German in “100 Solution Scenarios for Conflicts Around the World,” Tectum (2011), pp. 230 ff.:

energy sources.” And: “Surrounded by three nuclear powers, and threatened by three others - the U.S., Israel, and France - it is understandable that Iran wants to keep the nuclear option open.” Also: “It is difficult to see why Iran should be subject to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, while Israel, India, and Pakistan have gotten away with enriching their uranium to weapons-grade levels.” In particular, there are also goals related to respect, such as: “Never again 1953! Sovereignty, no humiliation through interventions.” And “open dialogue of civilizations with the West at a high level.”

Johan Galtung is always concerned with resolving conflicts, reconciling people and entire nations, and establishing a rules-based order that is recognizably fair. His writings highlight the unnecessary costs of unnecessary conflicts. Iran may initially seem foreign to us with its religion. One cannot “prove” to anyone that their faith is idiosyncratic, their God strange, or bloodthirsty to the point of being animalistic - or that Sharia law could hardly be pleasing to God. However, practically every God is regarded as a peacemaker.

Regarding what needs to be overcome, or at least mitigated fairly, Galtung cites typical hierarchies as points of reference - and “hard and soft” aspects of religions as causes to be rethought²⁹ :

Hierarchies:

- Humans over the rest of nature
- Men over women
- Adults over children
- White people over others (racism)
- The upper class over the lower class
- One’s own nation over others (nationalism)
- One’s own country over others (patriotism)

Hard and soft aspects of religions:

- God is transcendent, above all things // God is immanent, within us
- God has chosen a people // People have chosen a God
- There is a Satan, down below // there is no Satan
- Satan has chosen people // People have designated Satans
- Monotheism // Polytheism, e.g., the Trinity
- Dualism // Monism
- Universalism // Particularism
- The state has established religion // Religion has not chosen a state.

7.2 Future politicians, shaped by happiness or suffering as children, with predictable consequences

As humanity, we are in an all-too-violent preliminary stage of civilization. Among the worst aspects is how billions of children and adolescents are forced to experience violence in their own environments. There are - it feels like for eons - countless textbooks, documentaries, novels, plays, and images on how traumatic childhood experiences have shaped the later behavior of violent and/or unscrupulous politicians. There is a wide range of forms of violence. Shakespeare knew and dramatized many of them, Aristotle identified many, and with Freud, extensive psychological studies began.

²⁹ Johan Galtung: 50 Years – 25 Intellectual Landscapes Explored, Kolofon Press (2008), p. 221

A book by Alice Miller has been particularly helpful since as early as 1983. The author explores the 'roots of violence' and offers many insights³⁰ :

“For several years now, it has been scientifically proven that the devastating consequences of childhood trauma inevitably rebound on society. This knowledge concerns every single person and must - if sufficiently disseminated - lead to a fundamental transformation of our society, above all to liberation from the blind escalation of violence. The following four points attempt to illustrate what is meant:

1. Every child comes into the world to grow, to develop, to live, to love, and to articulate their needs and feelings for their own protection.
2. To be able to develop, the child needs the respect and protection of adults who take them seriously, love them, and honestly help them find their way.
3. If these fundamental needs of the child are frustrated, and the child is instead exploited, beaten, punished, abused, manipulated, neglected, or deceived to serve the needs of adults - without any witness ever intervening - the child's integrity is permanently damaged.
4. The normal reaction to the violation would be anger and pain. But since anger is forbidden to the child in a harmful environment, and since the experience of pain would be unbearable in solitude, the child must suppress these feelings, repress the memory of the trauma, and idealize its attackers. Later on, the child does not know what was done to it.”

In points five through nine, the depth of the impact on children - and thus on future adults - was already hinted at in 1983, so to speak, “precisely foreseeable”; here are a few examples, summarized briefly:

Feelings experienced, such as pain and despair, later manifest against others (crime, genocide) and against oneself (drug addiction, mental illness, even suicide, etc.). Both often have a destructive effect on one's own children as well. It can sometimes help if an abused child “at least once in their life...” encounters someone who clearly knows that it is not the child, but their environment that is crazy. Relatives, lawyers, doctors, etc., can take the child's side, if only by “believing them.” Regarding the extent: Measurements on unborn children have revealed that children “feel and learn both tenderness and cruelty from the very beginning. And, even in the midst of war and chaos, more than mere relief can sometimes be achieved: children who experience ‘protection, respect, and honesty’ from their parents may later become highly sensitive and empathetic - they will then have no need to harm anyone. For them, it is incomprehensible “why their ancestors had to build a gigantic war industry to feel comfortable and safe in this world.”

Alice Miller's findings have been confirmed many times since 1983. I would like to supplement Alice Miller's work with a book by Nicole Strüber, ³¹ *, which offers a wealth of guidance on working with traumatized children - covering topics ranging from early childhood imprinting to prenatal stress, intergenerational trauma, and the development of resilience, among others. With regard to war-torn areas such as Iran, Gaza, etc., it becomes clear, on the one hand, how much more difficult it is to attempt therapy in the midst of ongoing war; on the other hand, empathetic understanding - even for orphans - can be very helpful, potentially leading to self-determination later in adulthood.

³⁰ Alice Miller: „Das Drama des begabten Kindes – und die Suche nach dem wahren Selbst“. Suhrkamp Taschenbuch 950, Frankfurt a. M. (1983), S. 196–197; (Alice Miller: “The Drama of the Gifted Child – and the Search for the True Self)

³¹ Nicole Strüber: “Risiko Kindheit,” Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart (2019); (The risks of childhood)

To understand the extent of the damage inflicted on children (by war and other forms of violence, such as structural violence), it is important to recognize that by no means are only violence-prone autocrats produced, but apparently just as many of the countless individuals who allow themselves to be manipulated by autocrats - not only in war, but in violence of all kinds³² :

“Many selfish, manipulative, and domineering leaders in business or politics are popular with many people despite their behavior. The reasons may lie in the childhoods of their followers, as reported by researchers led by Dayna Herbert Walker of San Francisco State University. According to their study, there is a connection between a person’s family environment during childhood and the leadership figures they prefer as adults. Adolescents who reported a high level of conflict at home were later more likely to identify socially undesirable traits as ideal leadership qualities.”

A single traumatic experience, such as a car accident, can cause lifelong anxiety and undermine self-determination from the outset. It is all the more devastating when children are directly exposed to protracted wars. Unlike in the past, many children and adolescents around the world are constantly exposed to media - especially television - showing how destruction can become “everyday” in many places. Neuroscientists are now studying these phenomena, including “concrete changes in the central nervous system.” Here is a typical description of the situation from the perspective of someone affected³³ :

“Thoughts keep circling: Did I forget something? What if something bad happens today? Jan struggles through the day, constantly on guard. Even when everything goes smoothly, the tension doesn’t disappear, because it has no specific trigger. What remains is the fear of a vague threat that may never materialize.

For more than 300 million people, such thoughts are part of everyday life, as they suffer from the world’s most common mental illness, anxiety disorder.”

So are those all too quick to resort to violence perhaps “just” particularly fearful? That may be partly true. It is always a question of how their society deals with risks and fears. It has to do with the state of their nation as a whole. Both can change, and so, accordingly, can the reactions of their rulers.

Thus, the U.S. began with George Washington, eventually moving on to Franklin Roosevelt, then Harry S. Truman (who gave the order for the first use of nuclear weapons), and further on to Barack Obama and Donald Trump. In Russia, the line went from Tsar Nicholas (a “family man”) eventually through Stalin and Gorbachev to Putin. For all those mentioned, Wikipedia offers a wealth of information about their childhoods - and it all fits together.

By no means new is the potentially tragic convergence of³⁴ ,

- What illnesses a ruler had
- What mental disorders and irrational behaviors may be associated with them
- And what obvious mistakes or dangerous actions the ruler actually carried out that fit this pattern.

³² „Sozialverhalten – Warum Menschen Tyrannen folgen“, in Gehirn&Geist 10/2020, S. 11; quoted from: Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies 10.1177, 2020“; (Social Behavior – Why People Follow Tyrants)

³³ Sophie Fessel: „Schaltkreise der Furcht“, in Gehirn&Geist 4 / 2026, S. 32; (Circuits of Fear)

³⁴ Pierre Rentschik and Pierre Accoce: “Ces malades qui nous gouvernent,” Stock, Paris (1976); and in German: “Kranke machen Weltgeschichte”, Econ Verlag, Düsseldorf (1978); (The Sick Make World History: The Background of Political Decisions by Adenauer, Churchill, Khrushchev, Eisenhower, and Many Others”)

What did currently powerful, rigid politicians have to endure as children and adolescents? Two examples, with notes from Wikipedia: Vladimir Putin's youth was marked by violence. His teacher Vera Gurevich reported that when he broke a classmate's leg at age 14, he said, "Some people only understand violence." Putin's father fought in World War II and had six siblings, five of whom were killed in action (as Putin himself wrote). And: "Donald Trump grew up with the belief that he was special and superior to others. His father reinforced this by telling him he was a 'king' and had to become a 'killer' in everything he did. Even in preschool, Donald stood out for his aggressiveness toward other children."

Diplomatically speaking (!), there must be a more comprehensive discussion on how to bring about significant changes toward "win-win situations." We as humanity must be aware and recognize that we - more or less all of us - find ourselves in a stagnant preliminary stage of civilization that we must overcome and leave behind for our survival. A hallmark of a lack of civilization is how certain politicians (and in some cases certain states) react disproportionately to challenges - often in violation of existing international law. If we - not just Iran - continue to deal with existential risks in an ideologically veiled, ritually one-sided manner, that is, with rigid prejudices, then we (humanity, both locally and globally) will fare like the driver whose tombstone reads: "He had the right of way."

After an escalating nuclear war, national borders will largely disappear – they may be replaced for instance by territorial boundaries with varying degrees of radioactive fallout. This must be avoided. The political pressure lies in the fact that a win-win situation can and must be extremely beneficial for every state and all people.

After an upheaval like the one in Syria, will "the world" then trust a new Iran? Groups of exiles who have researched the options for the country and prepared them as far as possible can play a central role. They would be the best CBM.

I have personally researched the effects of stress and violence on children. See my English book on the subject (the printed edition is out of print) at

<https://www.philipp-sonntag.de/foreveralert/ForeverAlert.pdf>

In German I wrote another book³⁵, based on experiences with many adults who were traumatized as children; here is a three-page summary as a file:

https://www.philipp-sonntag.de/files/Einfuehrung_Erinnerungskultur.pdf =

It is always dramatic and fascinating to see how victims "survived" unspeakable experiences and how this led to psychological trauma with long-term consequences. A central focus of this book is therefore the fates of children who have been scarred for a long time in their lives by trauma. Especially in recent decades, it has gradually become clear: The younger a child was when they suffered trauma, the deeper the psychological wounds were, and the greater the impact the damage and resulting despair could have on the affected person's later life.

For Germany, one might hope that children here are comparatively much less harmed than children in war zones, such as in Iran and as caused by Iran. In fact, children here are informed in detail by the media about bitter fates worldwide - and here, too, they suffer from bitterness and despair regarding their own life prospects and self-determination. They, too, feel abandoned, even to the point of being

³⁵ Philipp Sonntag: „Erinnerungskultur - Die gesellschaftliche Rolle von Zeitzeugen“, Frank & Timme – Verlag für wissenschaftliche Kultur, Berlin, März 2023, 196 Seiten; (Culture of Remembrance – The Social Role of Eyewitnesses)

“abandoned by all good spirits”; from a recent article in which journalist Jan Kixmüller interviews social, educational, and health scientist Klaus Hurrelmann³⁶ :

“Mr. Hurrelmann, you say that young people are doing poorly. Aren’t you exaggerating a bit?

No, I’m not exaggerating, because current studies show that adolescents and young adults today feel more stressed than ever before. The question arises, however, whether the younger generation faces greater challenges than the previous one - or whether they are simply less prepared for them.

What is your assessment of this?”

It is likely that both are true. Neither a war in Europe nor the debate over reinstating the draft was foreseeable ten years ago. Nor was the increasingly difficult economic situation anticipated. Add to that climate change, the notorious weakness of traditional political parties, and the unsettling dynamics of artificial intelligence.

Young people perceive this convergence of crises as a threat to their very existence because they have no experience with it. No one has prepared them for it. Older generations have already lived through crises; they do not feel nearly as burdened by them.”

Just as in Iran, children and adolescents in Germany have also had little opportunity to experience and learn self-determination in their environment. Consequently, there are many traumatized children here as well who later influence society as politicians and as people in positions of high responsibility in other important professions and roles. The psychological consequences are precisely known.

But how can we even begin to comprehend what is being done to children in Iran - and to children in other countries similarly affected by violence? An example of stress here is bullying. Now, it would be absurd to say of children in Iran: “The U.S. is bullying Iran.” It might, however, be helpfully absurd to look at the damage bullying can cause even without war - to get a sense of how much worse the damage will be for children in Iran.³⁷ :

“Bullying is a massive health problem. Whatever the specific causes of bullying may be, the harassment does not leave the victims unscathed. Children and adolescents who are bullied at school struggle with various physical problems, such as sleep disorders, headaches, loss of appetite, eating disorders, or frequent nausea. Even cardiovascular diseases, stomach and intestinal disorders, skin conditions, and breathing difficulties can occur. ... Bullying victims have a lower self-esteem and view others less favorably.”

In Iran, amidst a barrage of bombs, images of the wounded and dead are compounded by a deeply felt sense of personal danger. Children perceive their own environment as helpless, often hopeless. And yet, later in life, there are adults who are able to free themselves emotionally to such an extent that they make valuable contributions to their future society.

³⁶ Jan Kixmüller: “Die Jugend steht heute allein da – Forscher fordert Generationendialog“, Tagesspiegel 12. 9. 2023, S. B 22; (Today’s Youth Are on Their Own—Researcher Calls for Intergenerational Dialogue)

³⁷ Christian Wolf: Gewalt mit langfristigen Folgen - Gemobbt zu werden hat häufig Folgen für das ganze Leben. Wie lässt sich die fatale Gruppendynamik verhindern? In Gehirn&Geist 4/2026, S. 54-60; (Violence with Long-Term Consequences – Being Bullied Often Has Consequences for the Rest of One’s Life. How Can This Destructive Group Dynamics Be Prevented?)

7.3 The Future in Iran, with an Awareness of Culture, Freedom, Religiosity, and the UN Charter

Awareness of the civilization essential for survival has been deeply ingrained in Iran for thousands of years. There have always been people who recognized unnecessary suffering and demanded fundamental improvements for society. From this perspective, Iran is - - an equal and indispensable partner for any future shaping of humanity.

The United Nations Security Council is composed almost exclusively of “white” and “Christian” nations. Iran is not alone in viewing this arbitrariness as a poor foundation for world peace, including justice. Responsible founders and leaders of world religions (such as the Dalai Lama and the founder of the Bahá’í Faith) have therefore often emphasized the need for tolerance in our interactions with one another.

An example: As a Christian theologian, Albert Schweitzer sought to develop life in every form to its fullest potential. The ethic of “reverence for life” he developed seeks to mediate peacefully among people of differing interests, religions, and backgrounds. This includes harmony with animals and plants. Destroying life out of thoughtlessness, hatred, or greed is evil and reprehensible.

With regard to all of humanity, reverence for life prohibits the use of violence as expressed in war and terror, but also in racial fanaticism and in religious or political fanaticism, for

“Without reverence for life, humanity has no future.”

Within the community of shared destiny that is the United Nations, “reverence for life” is currently secondary to a plethora of egotistical particular interests. This is typical of a nation like Iran, from which unspeakable cruelties and dangers (especially nuclear) emanate both internally and externally, while at the same time it is exposed to a flood of external violence. Both have been mutually reinforcing for at least centuries. The sheer volume of evidence precludes any one-sided view.

In what context does Iran live, does its population live, regardless of whatever regime happens to be in power there? There is a great deal of hunger there, as there is worldwide: less for democracy, more for survival. And what is called democracy is part of the problem. It is understandable, then, that Iran - despite all its own misdeeds - refers to the U.S. as “the Great Satan.” And many poor countries are in a similar situation.

For me, this single image has a dual significance regarding the suffering caused by the lack of self-determination of people and nations, as the United Nations Charter is not being observed, and at the same time

- the image shows me both what, for example, Trump and the U.S. are contributing to
- as well as where Trump and the U.S. are failing to help.

The exhibition “Memoria” by James Nachtwey at Fotografiska Berlin (Jan. 31 – May 3, 2026) documents war, suffering, and disasters to evoke compassion and serve as a testament against forgetting. The exhibition demands close observation and reflects on the role of photography as a means of social change. The focus is not merely on combat operations, but on individual fates, the “ ” pain, and the longing for peace. Nachtwey sees himself as an eyewitness whose photographs serve as testimony. The exhibition is an invitation to understand the world from a perspective that views it as a fragile sequence of human experiences.

Much of this reality is captured not only by science but also, and often more poignantly, by artists. One example: A photograph by James Nachtwey, from “Sudan,

1993 – Famine victim in a feeding center,” reminded me of the overwhelming distress of many wounded people³⁸.

Despite all the hardships of the present: Iran has been a society firmly anchored in civilization for thousands of years, at times exemplarily helping to shape it, with the same commitment and courage seen in the opposition protests of recent years in many Iranian cities. In Germany, this attitude is very much alive through the “Human Rights Association for Migrants e. V.”³⁹

The crucial efforts to shape a livable and lovable future in Iran are very similar to those here, in China, in Greenland, on space stations in outer space⁴⁰ – just like everywhere else. Self-determination is a quality and, accordingly, a right of every consciousness! It can only be possible with every consciousness showing consideration for its own environment.

This attitude applies to all 193 UN member states. What must be considered to implement it pragmatically? Major changes are necessary. To this end, Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker has outlined three “Conditions for Peace”⁴¹ :

“1. ‘World peace is necessary. One might almost say: World peace is inevitable. It is a prerequisite for life in the technological age. As far as our human foresight extends, we must say: We will live in a state that deserves the name world peace, or we will not live.

2. World peace is not the golden age. Not the elimination of conflicts, but the elimination of a certain way of waging them is the inevitable peace of the technological world. This world peace could very well become one of the darkest epochs in human history. The path to it could be a final world war or a bloody revolution; its form could be that of an inescapable dictatorship. Nevertheless, it is necessary. ... Its approach is expressed in the gradual transformation of previous foreign policy into global domestic policy.

3. Precisely for this reason, world peace demands an extraordinary moral effort from us. It is a condition of our existence, but it does not come of its own accord, nor does it come of its own accord in a favorable form. As far as we know, world peace has not existed since the dawn of humanity; something unprecedented is demanded of us. The history of humanity teaches us that what has been unprecedented until now is often realized one day. This does not happen without extraordinary effort; and if peace is to be worthy of humanity, the effort must be moral. ... We must, in general, develop an ethic of life in the technological world.”

The Author

Philipp Sonntag, born in 1938 in Halle/Saale, studied physics and “political science” from 1958 to 1964 in Munich. Until 1978, he worked with Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, primarily on issues related to the consequences of nuclear war and arms control. He serves on the board of “Netzwerk Zukunft.” With regard to Iran, he is in contact with the “Human Rights Association for Migrants e.V.” As a writer, he has a broad range of interests; see <https://www.philipp-sonntag.de/vollstaendige-bibliografie.html>

³⁸ <http://www.jamesnachtwey.com/jn/images/JN0011SUINGA.jpg>

³⁹ www.menschenrechtsverein.org

⁴⁰ Alexander Gerst: “The Moon Is Our Eighth Continent,” in *Tagesspiegel*, April 1, 2026, pp. 1, 10-11.

⁴¹ Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker: “Conditions of Peace,” Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, (1964), pp. 7ff.