

# Raisi protected Iranians' identity against global tyrants

## 'Iranian colonial studies' seeks to understand the historical reactions of the Iranian nation to the colonialists



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INTERVIEW  
EXCLUSIVE

As international tensions continue to rise and we witness various internal and external crises, it becomes increasingly evident that the more Iranians achieve self-awareness, the less vulnerable they become to colonial exploitation in its many forms. This self-awareness can protect their human, material, and spiritual resources from being plundered. Dr. Mousa Najafi, a full professor of political science at the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies (IHCS), currently heads this significant center for humanities. One of his most important projects is "Iranian Colonial Studies," which aims to offer a new perspective on colonialism and its operations within Iran's geographical and political landscape. Dr. Najafi has made significant contributions to the intellectual foundation of the Islamic Revolution through his noteworthy publications, such as "The Philosophy of the Islamic Revolution and Our Future," "Constitutional Studies," "The History of Political Developments in Iran," and "The Postmodern Revolution and Islamic Civilization." In this interview, he elucidates the importance of Iranian identity and the role of Shiism in shaping this dynamic identity, which has manifested itself in the establishment of the Islamic Republic's political system.

**IRAN DAILY:** The people of Iran participated in the funeral ceremonies for President Raisi and his other martyred associates in their millions. How do you interpret this turnout? Why do you think Ayatollah Raisi was able to immortalize his name in Iranian history?

**NAJAFI:** I will answer your question by citing an example from Iranian history. There are several similarities between Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi and Mirza Taghi Khan-e Farahani known as Amir Kabir, one of the significant figures in Iran's history. One similarity in their social standing is that both individuals came from the lower strata of society and rose through their inherent merit to accomplish substantial foundational work within approximately three years of leadership. This includes the implementation of a national and indigenous economy, a principle both firmly believed in. Another similarity is that both were people-oriented and deeply cared for the public; they stood steadfast by their beliefs until their last breath. Ultimately, both were buried beside their revered leaders, one beside Imam Hussein (PBUH) and the other beside Imam Reza (PBUH).

I provided this historical example because I believe that understanding history reveals the hidden secrets of current politics. In my opinion, what most closely connects these two national heroes and martyrs is their independence from nefarious foreign policies and, more importantly, their efforts to cleanse Iran's governance from the waves of foreign deceit and subversion.

Martyr Amir Kabir took the helm of Iranian politics during Naser al-Din Shah's era when the toxic remnants of the Treaty of Turkmenchay had left Iran and its people weak and suffering. He addressed and resolved this sinister legacy of foreign infiltration through his astute policies.

On the other hand, our beloved Ebrahim was able to confront those who sought to demean the body, soul, and identity of Iranians in the face of tyranny. Thus, this time, another son of Iran, in the guise of a religious scholar, wisely treated the wounds inflicted by the poor governance of his predecessors who sought to establish relations with the oppressors.

The last two hundred years of Iranian history have consistently shown that Iran's true indepen-

dence shines brightly in the East, thanks to men like Amir Kabir and Raisi. As long as this land is rich enough to nurture such men, foreign deceit and subservience will find no foothold here. The emergence of such stars in a nation's political firmament requires pure soil enriched by the blood of its martyrs like Amir Kabir and Raisi.

**What is your definition of Iran?**

When we speak of Iran, we consider several dimensions: a geographical Iran, which resembles a cat in shape; a political Iran, which is larger and takes the shape of a lion; and a cultural Iran, which is as expansive as an elephant, extending to India and Tajikistan. Furthermore, the Islamic Revolution has added a new dimension to Iran, one that extends to virtually all countries with a Shia presence. The next circle encompasses the Islamic world, including non-Shia regions that have drawn closer to us due to their shared enmity with our greatest adversary, Israel.

In my view, the foundations of Iranian identity are threefold: Shia Islam, which has been particularly significant since the Safavid era; the Persian language; and the country's geography and history. There is an often-overlooked aspect of Iran: the unique characteristic of Shia Islam being the majority religion here.

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

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

After the revolution, when the idea of the "Ummah" (global Muslim community) gained prominence, some avoided discussing the significance of Shia Islam to prevent potential conflicts. How-

ever, this is crucial. The notion that all Muslims are equal has led some to adopt an anti-nationalist Ummah-ism, which is the opposite extreme of the Pahlavi view. Both perspectives are marked by excess. Any ideology, even Ummah-ism, must have a starting point, and for us, that is Iran.

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

**What does "Iranian Colonial Studies" mean, and why is it a focus at the IHCS?**

The phenomenon of colonialism has been a significant issue not only for Iran but also for a wide range of countries over the past few centuries, impacting the world at large. While colonialism is considered a global and international phenomenon, its presence and manifestation have not been uniform everywhere. Naturally, the specific impacts on different countries necessitate independent and interconnected studies.

When we refer to the concept of "Iranian Colonial Studies," it is not about creating a new term but rather about gaining a new scientific understanding of one of the most critical reactions of the Iranian nation to preserve its identity and character against foreign aggression and infiltration. This complex and prolonged process can sometimes be observed

openly and sometimes covertly. The theoretical and intellectual understanding of history helps us identify and examine this crucial resilience in various dimensions. Indeed, national Iranian colonial studies intersect historically and intellectually with the broader, transnational movement of Islamic awakening, which has significantly evolved through the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Thus, Iranian colonial studies encompass both national and transnational identity as well as religious identity. Therefore, in the course of historical evolution, one can clearly speak of "Iranian Islamic Colonial Studies."

Understanding the perspectives of the Iranian people in different historical periods regarding crises, situations, actions, or reactions to colonialism reveals a common logic and a unique mindset that narrates the complex and profound culture and spirit of the Iranians. It is not only important to comprehend, describe, and analyze this viewpoint, but also to scientifically and academically articulate the logic and theoretical and practical actions and reactions associated with it. In this regard, Iranian colonial studies are akin to the relationship between "history" and "historiography."

Sometimes, we discuss a topic and find several pieces of evidence and reasons that have no impact on the current state of society, mentality, or insight. However, sometimes the issue is seen as a kind of trend analysis, a trend that is both indicative of past understanding and influential in today's social and political life. Even more importantly, and deeply, is when this trend analysis

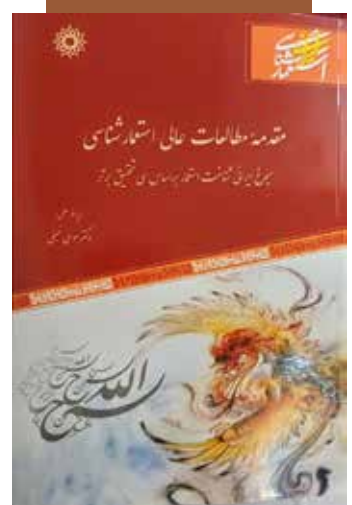
intersects with a kind of "school of thought" analysis. The study of Iranian colonialism, which has been a continuous trend in the recent centuries' historical transformations of Iran, has reached a maturity in the context of Islamic awakening and its civilizational stage—the Islamic Revolution—that can rightly be referred to as the Iranian Islamic Colonial Studies School.

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

We owe it to the Safavids. The Pahlavi dynasty cannot be compared to any other royal dynasty in Iran because unlike the others that naturally emerged, the Pahlavis were dependent from the start. How can a dependent dynasty build a nation? This element of dependency is evident in the grandfather, father, and even the grandson of this family today.

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

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



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