

The American Enterprise Institute, one of the influential and hawkish think tanks in the United States, and based on Seymour Martin Lipset's theory of social cleavages, held a conference in 2005 entitled "The Unknown Iran: Another Case for Federalism?" In it, speakers, emphasizing the ethnic and cultural diversity in Iran and offering biased and tendentious analyses, claimed that Iran, compared to countries like Iraq or Afghanistan, is more susceptible to fragmentation and federalism. They argued that the US should support ethnic and religious minorities in Iran to create political changes and, ultimately, fragment the country. These audacious and interventionist approaches clearly show what sinister plans the enemies have for Iran and Iranians and how they are trying to exploit our country's ethnic and cultural diversity,

which is a point of strength and a unique opportunity, turning it into a weakness and a threat, and thereby achieving their vile goals. This conference and the discussions held within it can be analyzed within the framework of Francis Fukuyama's End of History and Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations — theories that seek to impose the superiority of Western liberal democracy and create confrontation and conflict between different civilizations and cultures! While the great and proud Iranian nation's response to these threats and conspiracies has always been, and will continue to be, unity, solidarity, national cohesion, and standing firm against the enemies, the country's officials and rulers, to counter the new phase of threats from the enemies and neutralize their conspiracies, must adopt comprehensive and multifaceted

strategies that encompass all dimensions and aspects of this complex threat. These strategies must be implemented in a coordinated and coherent manner in various political, economic, social, cultural, and security areas to effectively eliminate the grounds for instability and insecurity and to strengthen unity, solidarity, and national cohesion. First and foremost, national unity must be strengthened by emphasizing shared cultural, historical, religious, and national commonalities, based on the principle of nation-building. Any action that leads to division, extreme ethnic nationalism, and fueling ethnic and religious differences must be strongly avoided. One of Iran's problems in this regard is the occasional deployment of weak and imprudent officials in sensitive positions, especially in multicultural regions,

which, at historical junctures, leads to crises in the country. Naturally, in addressing this issue, it is necessary to exercise greater deliberation and reflection in the selection of officials, even for the smallest responsibilities. Furthermore, through balanced and fair development of different regions of the country, especially border and deprived areas, the grounds for dissatisfaction, discrimination, and deprivation must be eliminated. The creation of economic and social cleavages, which can be exploited by enemies and fuel environmental insecurities, must be prevented. Moreover, all ethnicities and religions must be involved in the country's affairs, at various levels of decision-making and implementation, to strengthen their sense of belonging, responsibility, and participation in the country's

destiny. The creation of any sense of discrimination, injustice, and marginalization among them must be avoided, and social justice must be considered as one of the main pillars of lasting security. Furthermore, all media and cultural tools, especially state TV, social networks, and cyberspace, must be used to enlighten and raise public awareness. People must be made aware of the enemies' sinister goals and conspiracies, especially in provoking ethnic and religious fault lines. In addition, national and Iranian-Islamic identity must be strengthened, and the sense of national belonging and pride among all ethnicities and religions, especially their younger generations, must be reinforced. Patriotism must be promoted as a noble and unifying value. Beyond what has been stated so

far, by emphasizing the high values of Islam, especially the unifying and brotherhood-seeking teachings of the holy religion of Islam, the grounds for convergence, solidarity, and unity among all ethnicities and religions must be provided. The fueling of any kind of difference, division, and religious conflict that could be exploited by enemies must be strictly avoided. Finally, intelligence agencies must also, with vigilance, insight, and sharpness, monitor all the movements and conspiracies of the enemies and, by adopting preventive and deterrent measures, prevent any action that harms the national unity, security, and territorial integrity of the country. Preemptive security must be considered as a fundamental principle in countering the threats of enemies.

Who marches on fault lines of Urmia, why?



People walk on the dried parts of the Urmia lake in northwestern Iran.
● ALI HAMED HAGHDOST/IRNA

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O P I N I O N

The authentic traditions of Iran have always been upheld by the Iranian ethnic groups. One of the characteristics of Iran is that throughout various upheavals, invasions, wars, and hostilities, it has been these diverse ethnic groups and languages in Iran that have prevented the entity known as Iran from being challenged or weakened. What has happened is that certain Nowruz traditions are being

revived by various ethnic groups in Iran, and indeed, the country is indebted to those who preserve such ancient traditions. On the other hand, we see that there have always been groups and movements that have tried to exploit Iran's ethnic and identity diversity to break up the country. I believe that the red line for all authentic Iranian ethnic groups is the entity called Iran. Although these groups uphold their own traditions and customs, whenever any movement has leaned toward separatist policies or slogans, they have quickly been pushed aside by the people themselves.

We have had such separatist movements in Iran since World War II, and it was the Kurdish and Azeri people of Iran who prevented the country's disintegration. After that, especially after the Islamic Revolution, we saw various separatist movements emerge, which again faced public backlash. Iranian ethnic groups know that it is through Iran that they can take pride in their identity in the world — this is a fact.

Dangerous dichotomy facing nation's joy

The second reality is that no one can stand in the way of people's happiness. What has taken shape in recent years is that some of the

country's joyful traditions are being revived, and this joy is rooted in Iranian culture. Any dual exploitation of this joy is condemnable. Reactionary and extremist movements that oppose people's happiness are, in practice, harming the foundation of this country and its joyful way of life. After all, a family that smiles does not fall apart. A country where people live joyfully can always maintain its dynamism. I believe any opposition to joy harms the country. On the other hand, any exploitation of joy for separatist purposes is also condemnable. In any case, people come together during special occasions to



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celebrate. Iran is a country with two main pillars to its culture: Iranian identity and Islamic identity. Even in official development plans, the first clause emphasizes these two dimensions, and cultural policies must accordingly preserve them. Thus, people have always tried to uphold mutual Islamic and Iranian values in this culture, using them for coexistence rather than conflict.

Officials should avoid political bias

Next year, the first day of the new year coincides with Eid al-Fitr, and naturally, this will be a double celebration. These are the realities. Unfortunately, however, some past and present officials, ignoring these facts, have acted in ways that lead to ethnic exploitation and division — something I find indefensible. I believe the current government under Mr. Pezeshkian could and should have performed better. I don't want to politicize the issue, but Mr. Pezeshkian's votes came amid unprecedented solidarity between Kurds and Azeris, and other ethnic groups like the Baluch also supported him. This reflects a non-political rainbow in the country. In such circumstances, government officials — who may themselves be of Kurdish, Azeri, Baluch, or other ethnic backgrounds — must adopt a national perspective on these matters. Instead of taking ethnic or linguistic stances, they should act as unifying figures.

The article first appeared in Persian on IRNA.



Iranian presidential candidate Massoud Pezeshkian holds up his birth certificate before signing up for the race in June 2024. Pezeshkian is of both Kurdish and Azeri backgrounds.
● FARARU



The municipality of Urmia organizes the celebration of Nowruz through the Azeri folklore rituals of Takam Gardani and Sallama Shaal in March 2024.
● IRNA