

Founded in 1972. Formerly Defense & Foreign Affairs Daily Volume XXXI, No. 3
Wednesday, January 16, 2013 © 2013 Global Information System/ISSA.

Essential Reading: Important New Strategic Literature

Pivotal Persia:

How Context and Detail in Historical Study Can Benefit Policy In and Toward Iran at a Critical Point in History

The Memoirs of Ardeshtir Zahedi. Volume One: From Childhood to the End of My Father's Premiership (1928-1954)

Premiership (1928- 1954). By Ardeshtir Zahedi. As told to Ahmad Ahrar. English Edition, translated from Farsi by Farhang Jahanpour. Bethesda, Maryland, 2012: Ibex Publishers. ISBN: 978-1-58814-073-9. 514pp., illust. Hardcover. \$40.

Reviewed by Gregory R. Copley, Editor, GIS/Defense & Foreign Affairs. Important books change minds forever, in important ways. And most important books come as surprises; their messages unexpected, the readers almost always drawing lessons from the text and amalgamating them with their own experiences to create new and life-changing insights into reality.

The Memoirs of Ardeshtir Zahedi is such a book, even though we have seen only the first of four planned volumes in English. It comes at a time when the world needs to understand the importance of Iran - the focus of the book and the land of its author - and therefore to understand the nuance and texture of that state and society at a time when Iran is critical to the future of the

Middle East and, in many respects, the East-West strategic balance.

It also comes at a time when the Iranian people need to understand themselves the internal and global context of their recent past, because this knowledge has been denied to them, too, because of more than three decades of confusion since the departure of the Shah from the Peacock Throne. Fortunately, the first two volumes of the former Foreign Minister of Iran (1966-73) are now already circulating in Farsi inside Iran, and drawing considerable attention.

Ardeshtir Zahedi's life and career have been the stuff of legend. He has always been a man of action, rather than the traditionally perceived essence of a diplomat, even though his career has been built around diplomacy¹. He has, in reality, been the quintessential statesman, quietly linking many of the great leaders of the post-World War II era. It was this which helped propel Iran from its status as a nation struggling to



escape from foreign power domination and attempting to build into a modern civilization capable of integrating with the major industrial and economic powers of the world.

Zahedi had a willing partner and mentor in the Shah, who was impatient for national modernization and the restoration of Persia's rôle as an historical power. As a result, the Shah gave Ardeshir Zahedi virtually a free hand to speak with foreign leaders, and this license he used to the fullest, getting to meet and know every US President, from Dwight D. Eisenhower through Jimmy Carter, and also those who came after. He met with most European and Soviet leaders; and the leaders of Turkey, and the Middle East, including many Israelis.

Even during World War II, and the kidnapping (and forced exile in the Levant) of his father, Lt.-Gen. Fazlollah Zahedi, by the British forces then in Iran, Zahedi came as a young boy to meet people who would later come to prominence in Iran and the region. What is perhaps disarming - even disconcerting - to the reader of his Memoir is the fact that Zahedi speaks ill of so few people. He even finds kind words for US Pres. Jimmy Carter (1977-81), whose staggeringly misguided actions undermined Iran and the Shah's Government and gave impetus to the rise of the radicals and clerics who seized the country.

But Ambassador Zahedi does have harsh words - understandably - for such actors as British intelligence officer (and later parliamentarian) Fitzroy MacLean (later Sir Fitzroy), who had held a revolver to his father's head and kidnapped him during World War II. And for Kermit ("Kim") Roosevelt, the US Central Intelligence Agency

(CIA) officer who claimed to have been responsible for the counter-coup to remove radical Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh in the Summer of 1953.

Perhaps the most important part of the Memoirs is that vivid, first-hand description of the events of 1953, and what led up to them. The book, with overwhelmingly convincing detail and with massive documentary support from US, British, and personal archives, overturns the six decades mythology which built up around the overthrow of Mossadegh and his attempt to seize total power.

This documentation by Zahedi leads the reader to the absolutely breathtaking realization that it was not Kim Roosevelt; not the CIA; and not the British Secret service (MI.6) which caused the overthrow of Mossadegh. It was an event which built around a complex rejection by the Iranian people of the Premier and his attempts to grab total power. This was a spontaneously-combusting rejection of attempted totalitarianism if ever there was. The US and UK ambassadors to Tehran at the time were largely unaware of the train of events. The CIA and MI6 did indeed attempt to play in the turbid waters of the time, but they were neither decisive nor coordinated with the forces which eventually stood alone against Mossadegh and his military clique.

There was no question that it was then-retired Gen. Fazlollah Zahedi who - after a lifetime of direct combat in which he had proven his physical and mental heroism, and had the scars (and bullets still in his body) to prove it - mobilized various factions of the Iranian population, the military, and the media to oust Mossadegh. Ardeshir, still a

young man and assistant to his father, participated in these maneuvers, also at great personal risk, to help restore democratic government to Iran.

It is all too easy to forget that Iran had enjoyed a very lively and diverse Majlis until Mossadegh - himself given a parliamentary mandate to govern - had suspended parliament in order to rule by decree. The Shah, as constitutional Monarch, had played his part in bringing the Mossadegh situation to an end, not by intervening in the political process, but by signing the legal instruments to end Mossadegh's premiership when Mossadegh had clearly lost his mandate to govern, and to appoint Gen. Zahedi in his place. But Mossadegh had rejected his dismissal and fought to impose his own writ. The Shah briefly left the country, via Iraq to Rome, to allow the political factions to show themselves. To give Mossadegh enough rope to hang himself. In this process, there was no doubt that Mossadegh's removal was ignominious, largely because the ultra-leftist leader - working with the Soviet-backed Tudeh (Communist) Party - could not conceive that he did not have the power to dictate terms.

What transpired was that the Shah was invited back to Iran by popular acclaim; it was not a counter-coup which he initiated nor managed. Neither was it a foreign-sponsored counter-coup against Mossadegh. Indeed, the restoration of the Shah, and legitimate, elected governance, was supported by not only by the public, but by the important Shi'a clerics of the time, who worked well with the Shah.

What does all of this mean, even after 60 years?

Simply this:
Generations of international analysts as well as Iranian citi-

zens have grown up with the myth that the events of 1953 were not the result of the dynamic of the Iranian population, but were, rather, the result of some ability of the US and the UK to totally manipulate Iranian affairs. This has meant that many in the US, in particular, believed that the Shah was "their man" and was indeed a puppet of Washington. Many in Iran were conditioned to believe the same thing. The result has been a profound reaction on the part of the Iranian people about the somehow mystical powers and malign intent of a foreign power to interfere in their affairs. The same view of the US coercive capabilities has also been perceived by other peoples, particularly in the Middle East, with the result that the US has been perceived as either an unrealistic threat or an unrealistic savior or arbiter of affairs.

In other words, the misperception has severely skewed political behavior in Iran, the broader Middle East, and in the international community at large.

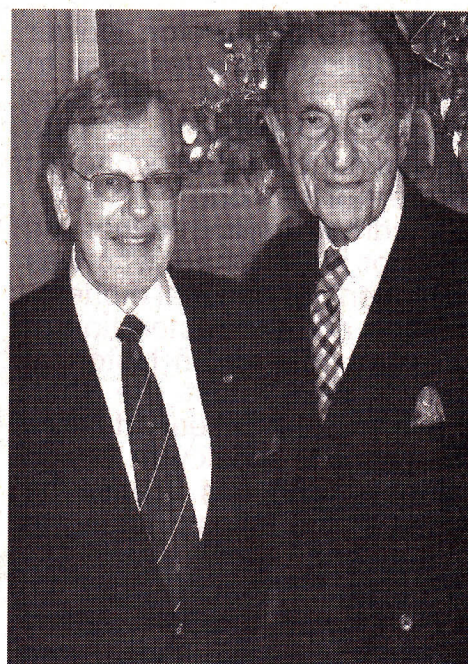
If nothing else, the growing depth and granularity of Ardeshir Zahedi's detailed reminiscences and supporting documentation should demonstrate to the Iranian population that it has been, and could again be, the master of its own fate. Zahedi showed also that the clerics were not historically united in an extremist view of politics; on the contrary, they were themselves representative of the balances of the Iranian population. Certainly, as the Shah came to observe (to this reviewer, among others) that his greatest fears were the "alliance of red and black" - the alliance between the (red) communist elements, including the Tudeh Party and others, and the (black) extreme right-wing Islamist clerics - it did not preclude the Shah also accepting the historical rôle of Shi'a clerics in Iranian society.

Ardeshir Zahedi's first volume

of Memoirs is an historian's treasure, even apart from his valuable reminiscences. It includes almost 200 pages of documentary evidence to support the flow of his narrative, much of this material de-classified from US and UK sources at some considerable cost to Amb. Zahedi, who initiated requests for documentation from the US and British authorities. Now this information is on the public record, much of it for the first time. The documentation means that anecdotal reports as Kim Roosevelt's 1979 book, *Counter coup: The Struggle for the Control of Iran*, can now be balanced by an Iranian perspective.

Significantly, the continuing Iranian apologists for Mohammad Mossadegh - ultra-leftist as well as nationalist groups opposed to the clerics - and the clerics themselves continue to utilize over-dramatizations of CIA engagement in Iran to further their particular causes. One of the ironies highlighted in Amb. Zahedi's first volume is that Kim Roosevelt alleged that he had met with Gen. Zahedi, before the toppling of Mossadegh and that the two spoke together in German. But the Memoirs notes that Gen. Zahedi did not speak German and did not meet Kermit Roosevelt until after the end of the Mossadegh period. The superficiality of the US diplomatic and intelligence penetration of Iran continued even as US-Iranian relations warmed through the Administration of US Pres. Richard Nixon. Even in the 1970s, when this reviewer was spending time in Iran, there were no Farsi-speakers in the US Embassy in Tehran; neither in the State Dept. element nor, apparently, in the CIA component there.

What Amb. Zahedi's monumental project does - and what the first volume of the Memoirs already shows - is that depth and perspective on the Iranian affairs of World War II and after



Former Iranian Foreign Minister Ardeshir Zahedi (right) with International Strategic Studies Association Pres. Gregory Copley

is now readily available, and can help make public perspectives and discreet policy formulation more meaningful and realistic.

Footnotes:

1. Ardeshir Zahedi was named, in December 2012, as the recipient of the 2013 International Strategic Studies Association's most prestigious decoration, the Award for Outstanding Contributions to Strategic Progress for his lifetime of work in helping to shape Iranian national management, and for his rôle as Foreign Minister, twice Ambassador to Washington, DC, as Ambassador to the Court of St. James's, and as advisor to the then Shah of Iran and as assistant to Lt.-Gen. Fazollah Zahedi, Ardeshir's father, before, during, and after Gen. Zahedi's Premiership of Iran. See *Defense & Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy*, 11-12/2012, and *Defense & Foreign Affairs Special Analysis*, January 4, 2013, for details of the ISSA Award announcement.