

# Lessons of Diplomacy for the 21st Century

*Few diplomats in the 20th Century were as active or influential as Iran's Ardeshir Zahedi, who remains active while living — and writing — from exile in Montreux, Switzerland.*

Few diplomats have had the far-reaching vision and impact achieved by former Iranian Ambassador and Foreign Minister Ardeshir Zahedi in the post-World War II years and until 1979. Now 92, and still active, we asked his views on topics related to strategic maneuver in the 21st Century.

Defense & Foreign Affairs publisher Pamela von Gruber met with Amb. Zahedi in Montreux, Switzerland, to discuss current issues, just as the third volume of his memoirs was being published in English. He is also still active as Patron of the Zahedi Center for the Study of Monarchy, Traditional Governance, and Sovereignty within the International Strategic Studies Association (ISSA), which publishes Defense & Foreign Affairs.

Amb. Zahedi was Foreign Minister of Iran from 1966 to 1971, and served twice as the Shah's Ambassador to the United States, and as Ambassador to the Court of St. James. His remarkable memory and grasp of history make any discussion with him, inevitably, long, detailed, and fascinating ... and difficult to distill into a succinct document.

We see economic and political sanctions being applied, mainly by Western governments, not just on Iran but on other states. Do you think that sanctions help resolve strategic differences or achieve desired outcomes by coercing target countries either to the negotiating table or to change?

Sanctions by one government against another are a form of blackmail, or strategic coercion. They can often lead to unintended consequences, especially if taken too far. So, frankly,

to repeat: I am against sanctions because of the unintended consequences and when taken too far.

Sanctions as a weapon tend to be inhuman and inefficient in achieving strategic objectives.

I understand that sanctions can be a form of negotiation, but if taken too far, or if they are not really used as a form of negotiation, then the results are not beneficial to anyone.

In the case of US sanctions against Iran, for example, the major suffering is inflicted on the 82-million Iranians, not the clerical Government. And, as we have seen, the sanctions actually strengthened the hands of the Government of Iran and hurt the Iranian people, who have not been anti-US. But when you impose and maintain sanctions, you are forcing people to become your enemies because you have victimized them.

If sanctions are to be used then they need to be used like a bullet over a short duration, and with specific objectives. But then it is necessary to follow up with creative diplomacy.

But by prolonging punitive sanctions against Iran the US inevitably brought the Iranian Government together with the People's Republic of China (PRC) Government, clearly an undesirable outcome for the US. Equally, the sanctions against Iran [and against Russia] caused Iran and Russia to come to depend on each other. Again, this was clearly an unintended consequence of US sanctions, and harmed US interests.

A great nation like the United States should not act like a child. If you look deeply into the history of Iran and the United States, you see that it goes back to the people who operat-

ed at a human level, with Americans working with Iranians on education and agriculture, and so on. I don't see any reason why these deep human relationships should be forgotten or abandoned. Iran needs the United States and the United States needs Iran. But if the sanctions are temporary, as I still hope they are, then we must work to solve the problem.

When I left Iran, and when the sanctions were begun, the population of Iran was 36-million. Today, 42 years later, the sanctions are punishing 82-million people [and the Iranian Government has, in this time, not succumbed to the sanctions]. That does not help the United States, and yet I have lived in the United States and love it. But sanctions are inhuman and do not work. Sanctions are a step towards war. With sanctions you hurt the people, and force them to side with their government. When people are happy, they do not see that the threat comes from the outside.

So the path we — the world — are taking is not getting us anywhere. And, yes, I know that [Ayatollah Ruhollah] Khomeini was the first to declare the US as the enemy, so the US did not start this. And the US was right to restrict its immediate response to sanctions, but the sanctions needed to be short-term to avoid the long-term problems we have been discussing. They should have been followed by creative diplomacy, but they were not [as each side fell back on its dignity].

And so, step by step, we fell into hell. The European states then distanced themselves from the US on the question of Iran, so this led to larger problems for Washington. After the Cold War, the imposition by the US of sanctions against post-Soviet Russia re-started, in a way, the Cold War. [US Pres. Richard] Nixon would not



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have done this. Nixon showed you could completely change the strategic dynamic by creative action.

Is the isolation of Iran by the US, in particular, making it more difficult for Iran to evolve and move beyond the “revolutionary” approach of the clerical Government?

Isolation has brought out some sense of purpose in the [Iranian] Government, so clearly the US policy of isolating Iran has not been good for Washington. And, yes, I think that the clerics [in Iran] cannot use the “revolutionary” approach as much any more. It doesn’t work. So the clerics will probably evolve to become a normal Iranian government.

Indeed, that process has already begun. They have developed relations with a lot of countries, even now starting a rapprochement with Saudi Arabia.

Despite everything, there is already a lot more openness and criticism in the Iranian media.

But we have to remember that humanity is above all nations. This was my primary orientation when I served Iran in diplomatic posts. Thinking in humanitarian terms served us well. We respected all our neighbors and this resulted in the greatest period of stability and progress in modern Iranian history.

For too long we saw foreign powers — starting with the British — attempting to use religion to divide the entire Middle East, to make it easier for them to control the region. But religion is like fire, and, if you play with it you will get burned. Of course religion in some form does reside in us all, and it is possible to abuse it, as Khomeini did [when he took power in Iran in 1979]. But that passes.

The Abraham Accords made the Middle East strategic momentum more about geopolitics than about religious issues. Could that, ultimately, help Iran to return to calmer dealings with the Sunni states and even, perhaps, Israel?

To be honest, I have not studied in detail the Abraham Accords. But, as I said, dividing the region on religious grounds is dangerous, and we have seen that when attempts to play “the religious card” go away — as we saw beginning to happen when Iran pursued a regional policy based on friendship and humanity during the Shah’s period — we see greater cooperation and stability.

So, from what I have seen, some parts of the Abraham Accords are clearly good, but we will have to see where it goes. After all, as we discussed, we are now seeing Iran talking with Saudi Arabia, so the process is moving in

the right direction.

I think it all gets back to humanitarian concerns. If we work toward better communication at a human level then it can only help.

The Shah wanted to see Iran on a trajectory to achieving the level of Japan by this time. What will it take to get Iran back onto that kind of economic and industrial growth track? Yes, that was the Shah’s dream. He had a real love for the Iranian people, and it was indeed his idea that Iran could achieve the economic success of Japan — at that time, and today, a great economy — within his lifetime. As he said, being King of a poor country is not a point of pride. He wanted to make Iran a wealthy country and to restore its positive example to the world. Look: I know that at that time we had a lot of corruption to overcome, but the Shah had a vision. And Iran, today, is still well-placed to achieve the Shah’s vision; to get back onto that path. Iranians are not only well-educated, but there is an enormous “youth bulge”, which means that the country is one of the few nations with a highly-educated, productive young workforce. Some 25 percent of inhabitants are under 14 years of age, while almost 69 percent are aged 15 to 64, and only about six percent of Iran inhabitants are aged 65 or older.

I am extremely happy that this potential exists in Iran. Despite the change in Government in 1979, which has kept me in exile, I consider all Iranians my brothers and sisters. And I’m particularly proud of the fact that half of this new “youth bulge” — some 70 percent of the 82-million people — consists of educated women; that means about 30-million educated and capable women.

This is the great wealth of Iran.

But Iran must have close relations with its neighbors if it is to prosper. That was always my goal when I was in the Government. We have to live in harmony with our neighbors.





## Essential Reading

### Important New Strategic Literature

# Conquering History

*The Memoirs of Ardeshir Zahedi, Volume Three (1966-1971): Minister of Foreign Affairs.* By Ardeshir Zahedi. As told to Ahmad Ahrar. Bethesda, Maryland, USA, 2021: Ibex Publishers. Hardcover, 481pp plus support docs in 2nd vol.; illust., indexed. ISBN: 978-1-58814-174-8. No price given.

INEVITABLY, A COMPARISON MUST BE MADE between former Iranian Foreign Minister Ardeshir Zahedi and British wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

When asked whether he thought history would treat him kindly, Churchill said that it would, for he intended to write that history. And he did. Similarly, Ardeshir Zahedi, the remarkable Iranian diplomat under the last Iranian Shah, has committed his exile years to writing — among other things — the history of Iran in the post-World War II era until the withdrawal of the Shah from office in 1979.

Ambassador Zahedi writes through the medium of his *Memoirs*, supported by an overwhelming quantity of supporting evidence drawing on declassified documents from Iran, the UK, the US, and other sources.

We are now at Volume Three of *The Memoirs of Ardeshir Zahedi*, covering the years 1966 to 1971, when he was Foreign Minister of Iran. The English-language edition of Volume Three came out in mid-2021, but the original Farsi edition came out a year earlier. It is a remarkable 481 pages of immensely readable history made digestible because of its “as told to” format, in which editor Ahmad Ahrar presents Amb. Zahedi’s words in conversational format. But the conversation should not be regarded as informality: it is supported by a second volume of thousands of reproduced original documents mostly declassified from Iranian, British Foreign Office, and US official files, and personally-saved records from the period.

Zahedi is working now on his fourth and final volume of his *Memoirs*, covering the final period of the rule of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi and the Shah’s — and Zahedi’s — subsequent exile. Through these ef-

forts, he is attempting, in the best sense, to “conquer history” by ensuring that all the possible evidence is out there to be seen and assessed by future scholars and policy officials from within Iran and externally.

Ardeshir Zahedi speaks matter-of-factly. He is old enough to do so, admitting his failures as well as his successes, his rivalries of the time and his unambiguous goals and loyalties.

Volume Three — which can easily be read as a stand-alone book, particularly for those interested just in events of the 1966-71 timeframe — tells of a critical time in Persian Gulf geopolitics. It discusses Zahedi’s reluctant, but full, support for the post-British independence of Bahrain, for example, and how he resisted the Iranian Parliament (*Majlis*) and even the Shah in how this was achieved.

It was, for many Iranians, a controversial move (and is viewed so by many, even today), but one which he saw as unavoidable. And it clearly was. Moreover, it is clear from reading Volume Three that the Bahrain move by Zahedi, resulting in the creation of a fully sovereign Bahrain in 1971, was historically good for both Bahrain and Iran.

Today, a good reading of that critical period of history could well be seen as a primer for how to revive good relations between the states of the Persian Gulf, includ-

ing Iran ... provided they could even start to agree on the name of what has historically been called “the Persian Gulf”. Certainly it has been that through modern historical periods, and if the Bahrainis, for example, wished to call it something else, then they would need to (and could validly) refer to a more ancient Bahraini era during the Dilmun civilization.

But where Zahedi was presciently conciliatory in pushing for Bahraini independence, he was equally unhesitating in his support for Iranian domination of the Greater and Lesser Tunb islands near the Strait of Hormuz. They were seized by Iranian forces — with some legal justification — along with the adjacent Abu Musa island, in 1971, and remain, in many ways, as critical to Iranian strategic security and influence today as the possession of Gibraltar remains for the United Kingdom.

Zahedi’s diligent work in exile has contributed more to Iran’s future, by documenting its past and its context, than most people could ever do for their country in a lifetime of work. — GRC

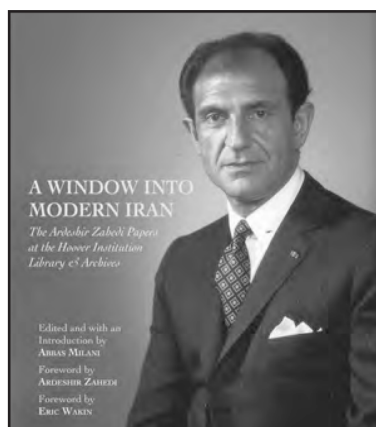
## On Intimate Terms With History

*A Window Into Modern Iran: The Ardeshir Zahedi Papers at the Hoover Institution Library and Archives.* By Abbas Milani (Editor), with Forewords by Ardeshir Zahedi and Eric Wakin. Stanford University, California, 2019: Hoover Institution Press. Oversized hardcover, 312pp; extensively illustrated. ISBN: 978-0-817-22174-3. \$59.95 (Canada \$80.95).

FORMER IRANIAN FOREIGN Minister and high-profile Ambassador, Ardeshir Zahedi, dominated a key area of Cold War diplomacy and international relations in the post-World War II period.

He was, and remains, an iconic figure, texturing that period of politics. Little wonder that a look at some primary sources on his career — most in the form of photographs of the key documents and people — gives the feeling of a privileged look into real history.

Prof. Abbas Milani, the editor of the work, is Iranian by birth and earlier academic life, and is Director of Iranian Studies at Stanford University, in California, and a research fellow and co-director of the Iran Democracy Project at the Hoover Institution. He was well-placed, then, to pick the gems from



Amb. Zahedi's trove of documents donated to the Institution. Eric Wakin, the Director of Hoover's Library and Archives, notes in his Foreword that the Zahedi collection is "one of the most remarkable political collections in recent history", containing more than 300 manuscript boxes of material and two gigabytes of digital files.

Significantly, and typical of Amb. Zahedi, the book begins with a profile not of the principal author but of his father, the late General and Prime Minister Fazlollah Zahedi, who was one of the key figures who helped fill the vacuum and chaos in post-Qajar Dynasty Iran. He did this by campaigning as the charismatic commander of a Cossack brigade to bring calm to Iran and to put Reza Khan in office as Reza Khan the Great, founder of the Pahlavi Dynasty.

So the profile of Gen. Zahedi and his own illustrious line of Persian leaders, complete with photographs, sets the stage for the book and for an understanding of modern Iran. Gen. Zahedi's profile is followed by a profile of his son, Ardeshir, who served the Pahlavi Peacock Throne with equally uncompromising candor, honor, and loyalty.

These profiles, which provide a history of modern Iran in many ways by themselves, are followed by the "Selected Documents", which provide some of the hitherto unavailable substance for historians and researchers. In all, 48 documents are presented, with accompanying explanations and, where necessary, translation from Farsi into English. And, indeed, most of the documents are shown in their original Farsi.

What this beautifully-designed, superbly-printed coffee-table-sized book delivers is some really new knowledge to most researchers, even those familiar with Pahlavi-era Iran, as this reviewer can claim to be. And, importantly, Prof. Milani ensures that this is not merely a collection of documents to paint a rose-colored view of Pahlavi Iran. It gives access to documents which highlight the private, and often controversial nature, of key participants in Iran around the last Shah, for example. It lists gifts from the Shah, but it also shows details of great political events.

Not only are we richer for having access to this volume, but the reader feels an intense satisfaction from being introduced into the salon of history as it was made. — **GRC**

## Leadership From On High

**Leadership Moments From NASA: Achieving the Impossible.** By Dr Dave Williams and Elizabeth Powell. ECW Press. ISBN 978-1-77041-604-8.

**J**OHN GLENN, THE FIRST US astronaut to orbit the Earth, used to tell a joke. As he sat atop his *Agena* rocket, he recalled that the rocket and his capsule were built by the contractors who submitted the lowest bids.

Glenn's successors often have their personal stories of how they were chosen, what they learned from their space adventures, and how it changed their lives. The co-author of this new book, Dr Dave Williams, a Canadian Space Agency medical doctor who made two NASA shuttle flights and multiple space walks building the International Space Station, told his personal story in his 2018 book, *Defying Limits: Lessons From The Edge of Universe* [Simon and Schuster, \$28.99 (US), 224 pages]. Williams also became the Director of Space and Life Sciences at NASA.

Doc Williams' second book offers a different look at NASA's history, highlighting the management lessons of the US manned space program from its great successes to profoundly tragic failures. The "highs" of NASA's manned spaceflight program include not losing a crew (except in training flights on Earth) during the early *Mercury* and *Gemini* programs, despite some very close calls. The crown jewel — the singular achievement of landing *Apollo 11* on the Moon in 1969 — was followed by five other successful landings which saw 12 men explore the lunar surface.

Subsequently, NASA's launch of the reusable Shuttle fleet followed, which made possible the lifting into orbit of the components of the International Space Station (ISS), now continuously manned for more than 20 years.

Williams equally addresses the management lessons from NASA's manned spaceflight disasters: the January 1967 *Apollo 1* fire which killed three astronauts in a test atop a booster rocket, grounding *Apollo* for two years while the capsule was totally reworked. In January 1986, the world watched the tragic destruction during launch of the *Challenger*, with the loss of the entire crew of seven, including school teacher Christa McAuliffe.

Again, the program was grounded for several years, and the solid rocket boosters which were the proximate cause of the failure were improved, as well as the safety culture which had been overwhelmed by the relentless schedule of pushing the number of launches and leadership failures that contributed to ignoring the warning not to launch in sub-zero

weather. The resulting rededication to a better safety culture led to 15 years of success, but on February 1, 2003, the 28th mission of the shuttle *Columbia* ended in its fiery destruction during reentry over Texas. Another crew of seven died, including the first Israeli in space.

In retrospect, the seed of the Shuttle's destruction began 82 seconds into launch when a 545 pound chunk of foam on the Shuttle's big orange fuel tank broke away and struck the leading edge of the Shuttle's left wing. The day after launch it was clear from high speed photos that the impact had been serious, but the Shuttle crew did not have the ability to repair in orbit, and NASA underestimated the damage.

The remaining Shuttles were grounded for good by 2011. It left the US with the humble "crow meal" of paying the Russians \$80-million a mission to fly its crew members to the Station.

Williams' book also examines the near disasters such as Neil Armstrong's improbable save of *Gemini 8*, and *Apollo 13*'s crew being saved despite the onboard explosion. Throughout, Williams and his co-author do a good job of resetting the program table. They particularly call out the rôle of George Low, who served as an early NASA spaceflight administrator and led the program forward after *Apollo 1*, and others including George Abbey who followed Low, and created a safety-first engineering culture that was NASA at its best. This book combines two genres, the story of the manned space program and the executive leadership books that use case studies for its lessons.

The US manned space program soared to success under US Pres. John F. Kennedy's clear direction to go to the Moon in a single decade. It has suffered since from lack of clear and attainable goals, lack of steady funding and support. But this book is a fresh new take on what happened behind the scenes and what lessons each of us can learn from this case study of managing an incredibly complex engineering enterprise of taking on space.

Doc Williams will need to draft a sequel addressing the decision to leave much of the business of launching cargo and astronauts to the private sector. And how the competition between Elon Musk's *Starship* and Jeff Bezos' *Blue Origin* rockets promise dramatic reductions in the cost of putting a pound of cargo in space, building on the threads of NASA's culture. — **Steve Ryan**

