

# Memorable Moments with Ardeshir Zahedi

We had the opportunity to sit a few moments with Ambassador Zahedi in Montreux, Switzerland. We discussed the current situations concerning Iran with a man who is famed to be one of the most experienced figures in the diplomatic world.

Ambassador Zahedi began by thanking several editors including Mrs Shabazi of Rahavard, Mr Mir-Hashem and Mrs Abasalti of Rah-e-Zendegui, Mr Parizi of Azadi and several other Iranian and foreign journalists for their recent interviews covering his reactions to the current developments so that he could be brief with no need go through the details.

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- *As a veteran diplomat how do you interpret the recent threats and restrictions against Iran?*
- AZ: On July 1st, 1968, I had the honour to represent my beloved country in the negotiations and signing of the Treaty for Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Together with the United Kingdom, the Scandinavian countries, China and USA we were amongst the first seven or eight states to adhere to the treaty. It was a cornerstone in controlling the nuclear armament. It is now a little more than 50 years and Iran has continued to respect its original engagements. There has in fact been no need for threats, blockades, hostile rhetoric, endless waste of time and energy. Much ado about nothing.

I have many reasons to consider the sanctions and restrictions that have been imposed upon Iran in the last decades as baseless and in defiance of international law. They have been in contradiction to the missions of the United Nations and its Atomic Energy Commission. We must think about the victims. Who has suffered?

Who is the winner of this war? More than 80 million Iranians, my dear compatriots, have been the innocent victims over the past 50 years.

Ever since 1954 my friendly relations with fourteen American Secretaries of State and their families have remained unaffected despite my years in exile and the Iranian Revolution. But now things seem to be changing.

Let me remind you that on April 18, 2017, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson wrote to the Speaker of the House Paul Ryan admitting that the administration of President Donald Trump believed that Iran was complying with the P5+1 Nuclear Agreement. However, two days later, he abruptly announced that the U.S. would review its entire Iran policy. Most unfairly, he associated Iran with North Korea and stated that Iran and its people were a threat to world peace and regional security. It was both amazing and confusing to see that Secretary Tillerson speaking of the failure of strategic policy and of losing patience with Iran. The role of a diplomat is to heal the wounds with restraint and tolerance.

*Do you think that Saudi Arabia continues to finance international terrorism?*

AZ: When you look at documents or follow the media you see that a good number of commentators confirm that Saudi money and support of certain allies is behind Daesh and other radical terrorist groups. Saudi Arabia today spends the greater part of its colossal oil revenues to buy the most advanced warfare technology, the modern arms of destruction, from the United States. The country has never had any experience in democracy and no success in bringing peace or prosperity. On the other hand, with the money from Saudis ISIS was born with a mission to chop off the heads of freedom lovers.

If Secretary Tillerson had time to look into the history and paid more attention to the composition of the great Iranian community in the United States and their contribution to the advancement of

science and economy, he would have realised that Iranians are not terrorists. The United States should be grateful to them and welcome them rather than enter into futile hostility.

It is enough to look at what the Iranians have achieved in the academic world everywhere and wherever they are. Mr Tillerson should also have learnt that decades of sanctions, rupture and conflicts with Iran or other nations have been counterproductive. It has led to nothing but misunderstanding, animosity resulting in the suffering of innocent people. When are we going to learn from history? Have we already forgotten what has been happening in **Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria** not to go so far back as **Vietnam**?

Throughout my diplomatic career and as representative of my beloved country, I have said it time over time in the United Nations General Assembly or other international organisations that the time of “gun diplomacy” is over. We are past the age of colonisation. Civilised people sit at the table of negotiation and look for diplomatic solutions. The roar of cannons must stop and we must realise that there is no problem, no conflict, no matter how sophisticated, for which a diplomatic answer cannot be found.

Diplomatic maturity and patience ceased four decades of futile discord and devastating contention over Iranian nuclear projects and the Vienna agreement paved the way for peaceful coexistence. It became, as it is universally acknowledged, a prologue to a safer world.

I must say that in all my years of experience, this is the first time I hear a man at the head of diplomacy of a great country uttering such regrettable, unfair and thoughtless accusations about my dear compatriots.

On January 26, a few days after taking office, the Trump administration decreed a temporary ban on the entry into the U.S. of people of several nationalities including Iranians. The executive order completely disregarded the American constitution. It established discriminatory religious tests and priorities for those wanting to visit the country.

As I wrote recently in the New York Times “*Iran is a nation with more than two and a half millennia of proud history and peaceful co-existence. It has enriched the world with its culture, literature and philosophy. Immigrants from all nations and creeds have helped build America and today, hundreds of thousands of Americans of Iranian origins live in the U.S. They, like their brothers and sisters around the globe or in their native land, are men and women of talent; scholars; artists; scientists; physicians; industrialists; and successful business people. Americans have admired their work and I am proud to be their compatriot. They are the promise, the future and the hope of our countries.*”

***What is the real role of diplomacy in ending international deadlocks?***

AZ: I can talk about numerous cases of world and regional crises which were settled by face to face discussion. Through humility, empathy and dialogue we can convert the greatest conflicts into understanding and peace, and save human lives. When sincerity and goodwill exist, even hardened terrorists can be convinced to lay down their arms and talk. Human beings have hearts and are responsive to love, understanding and generosity of mind.

Threats of war, the brandishing of military might, the use of weapons or sanctions can only lead to greater unrest and more catastrophe in the world. We should look again into the mirror of history and stop confusing the might of arms which cause only massive destruction with the legitimacy of rights.

Secretary Tillerson’s change of heart and mind in a matter of hours surprised everyone, especially America’s allies, and raised questions about the stability of American diplomacy.

Mr Trump has no right to tear down such an agreement when All the parties to the negotiations, in fact the whole world, admits that the nuclear agreement had made the world a safer place and had set a good example of diplomacy and political maturity. It was the fruit of years of negotiations and a good example of what diplomacy could achieve to avoid havoc.

***What should the Iranian community in the US do; how should they react to this attitude?***

AZ: First of all, the few Iranians who plead for dropping bombs on Iran and tightening of the sanctions against their own country betray the nation, their own ancestors and history. They forget that these bombs will kill their parents, brothers and sisters, ravage our heritage, what our fathers have achieved in the course of 5000 years of glorious history.

They should wake up, open their eyes and face the bitter realities of what has happened or is still happening to some of the neighbouring countries. Today, every Iranian should realize that his country is in danger; it is under ceaseless threats from some friends of the past and foes of the present. The manifest duty of those who still have some Iranian blood in their veins is first and foremost to fight to defend their country's integrity and independence. There is nothing nobler that they can ever do or that they have ever done in their lives.

Secondly, most of the Iranians living in the United states have an American passport and the right to vote; they are free to express their opinion. Their first duty is to defend the interest, integrity and independence of their great country of origin. All Iranians, whether in America, in other countries or in Iran should use their privileges to defend and protect their country. Those living in the States should write and discuss the matter with their congressmen and Senators, speak in public, use the media and modern technology of communication to make their voices heard.

***From where does "The National Council" get its financial support?***

AZ: I keep hearing about different associations, councils and groups that often think and talk about their own interests. They forget the essential questions: the integrity, existence, future of their country and the will of its noble people. We should first ask where do they get their legitimacy from? What tacit or explicit

mandate do they have from tens of millions of Iranians. Whom do they represent? Let us have some respect for the history of our country and our inherited values, the heritage of honour, the legacy of truth. We should not get lost in an infernal circle of self-deception. For their financial resources and the support they get you better ask them and find out if they have any Iranian origins!

Some political analysts consider the Iranian regime as ambitious and expansionist. If it were not so it would have been a mistake. Iranians by nature detest all foreign meddling in their affairs. If today Iran has approached Russia, it is the outcome of the American policy in the region, their arrogance, interference, sanctions and threats of war. America has provoked the animosity of so many nations in the region, the same country that a few decades ago was regarded as the harbinger of peace and progress.

Political commentators believe that in his recent trip to Saudi Arabia Donald Trump encouraged the rulers of the country to form an alliance of neighbouring countries against Iran. The Saudis naively believed that Trump was going to be by their side and support their move. They had not realized that the American president's sole objective was to conclude astronomical contracts for the sale of military equipment to boost his image in public opinion polls. We have seen that every action of the Saudis has been to satisfy the demands of the Americans. They are imprisoned in the confined cage of their dreams of Roosevelt era.

The Trump administration has contributed to the widening of division between the Islamic countries; the Shiite and Sunnite have rarely been so hostile towards each other. There are so many various fractions in the region like the Wahabis, the Salafists and fundamentalists.

Playing dangerous games with religious sentiments will only lead to disastrous consequences for the region and endanger the peace and security of the whole world. This is a reminiscent of the age of colonialism, the policy of "Divide and Rule." The fire was turning to ashes when they started to add oil and renewed the burning flame. I shall soon publish the third volume of Memoirs covering

the years I served as Minister of Foreign Affairs. We were then living through decades of peace, tolerance and coexistence. Religious groups had their own faith; each was respected by other; all were sitting at the same table of brotherhood. It is time to wake up and to concentrate our efforts for peace and coexistence, to make the world a better place to live at least for our children.

I have always said and I wish to repeat that I respect the ideas of everyone and profoundly believe in freedom of speech, but I also cherish my own freedom and enjoy expressing my personal opinions.

May God, the almighty, lead us to the path of truth; help us to open our eyes to see the light. May He protect Iran and its noble people as He has done in the course of thousands of years of our glorious history.