

On the 36th Anniversary of the Revolution in IRAN

"AS I RECALL"

The Events that Changed the Course of the History

BBC WORLD SERVICE

Former BBC Teheran Correspondent, Andrew Whitley's INTERVIEW WITH AMBASSADOR ARDESHIR ZAHEDI

In presence of the renowned author and broadcaster
Tim Kirby

BBC: A policy that was the result of bad judgement.

AZ: "In my opinion this was the sad truth."

BBC: What in your opinion, Mr Zahedi, among all mistakes was the most crucial blunder that the various governments inside Iran made during those final months?

AZ: "I do not think there was a government! There were three so called governments in 14 months and each of them incapable of doing anything and then another would come with a lot of noise but with no plan or power. At the same time we also had a military government and that for only five weeks. Then Mr Sadighi was supposed to become Prime Minister from the National Front and talking went on and on and everyone knows the history. He could not

arrange the things because there was fighting in his own group and amongst his colleagues. Then it was Mr. Bakhtiar who came to power. At that time Bakhtiar was actually supposed to work with the military but he used a lot of his power and energy against the military and that was itself weakening the moral and disintegrating the army; and this kind fight amongst the personalities on the top continued. Each of them wanted to come to power and we had the type of arguments that one wanted to become the minister of interior and not the minister of war and there were several who thought they should have been made prime minister. All these problems were the sources of our troubles and even the head of SAVAK at that time was not really playing his role correctly."

BBC: In the end perhaps this mission of General Heiser's was counter-productive. It led to disintegration of the morale of the armed forces....

AZ: "I could not agree with you more. Many of our generals came to me to show their anxiety. One of them even wanted to shoot Heiser in the head! This General Heiser's coming had made them more confused and they took it that he had come to tell them not to stay loyal to their king and that was more than they could swallow."

BBC: In the end they would leave and get out to save themselves whichever way they could...

AZ: "They were all destroyed. None of them was safe. You know how many generals they killed; how many colonels or how many civilians. It was a massacre which

was sad and shameful. I did not think and I could never believe that Iranians could do such things especially in the name of God, especially in the name of religion."

BBC: In the end what do you think was the final thing that made the Shah decides to go?

AZ: "It was when the American Ambassador met His Majesty and asked him that he should leave at the earliest possible. As a matter of fact in one place in his book, His Majesty explains that the Ambassador was looking at his watch as if he wanted him to leave then or suggesting that it would be better then than an hour later. And this either embarrassed him or made him mad with anger or weakened his morale. In any case that was when he took his last decision and then the same thing happened with the British Ambassador."

BBC: So finally he listened to the foreign ambassadors not to you as his closest advisor.

AZ: "Sadly so. It was because he had a particular respect for the foreigners and he listened to them and he believed that he could work with them, and that respect was perhaps too much and went far enough to finally destroy him."

BBC: Zahedi believed passionately that even at the last hour the Shah could still save himself. He could have handed over much of his power to become a genuine constitutional monarch but providing that he stood firm and negotiated with the opponents and refused to leave the country and then he could survive on the throne. Instead the Shah didn't do it and the growing chaos in the country engulfed the plan which if implemented some months earlier might have had a chance of success. In the dark last days of December 1978, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi came to the conclusion that his time was up and that he would have to leave.

But where was he to go to? Zahedi was heavily preoccupied in trying to improvise some arrangements. There was no obvious safe haven. Egypt offered the Shah a temporary refuge. So it was to Cairo that the monarch first flew. From there it was on to Morocco, The Bahamas, Mexico, The United States and Panama before returning to Egypt again. Moving from pole to pole the seriously ill Shah had become in Henry Kissinger's phrase: "The Flying Dutchman."

Zahedi himself flew out of Teheran a few days before the end as the last member of the family to join the Monarch, but quarrels broke out in the Shah's dwindling entourage. Angry with the shabby treatment accorded to him and to his monarch, Zahedi decided to return to his family home in Lake Geneva. From there he reflects with some pain on the way the West dealt with the Shah.

AZ: "It is not bitterness anymore. It is mostly the sad effects it had on the United States and the rest of the world. It is rather a kind of disappointment that makes me sad as it was a bad experience for me. I had a much higher view of the European culture, the European morality. It was why we in Iran, and I myself, loved to have the Europeans and the Americans in our country. We appreciated working with them and shared the same hope to see Iran as a progressive and democratic country. Yet here at last I saw the double edge; the hypocrisy, and that is what makes me sad." ■

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