

On the 36<sup>th</sup> 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:** If you had regarded Khomeini as the single leader of the opposition at that time what would you have advised the Shah?

AZ: "At that time the Shah was not really in a good mood and Khomeini not as powerful as you suggest. Khomeini became Khomeini after the overthrow of the Shah because during that last period he was the one who was sitting outside and saying out loud that he, the Shah, had to go. As I said, there were so many different and sad things that combined together: the government was not capable, there were fightings between the rivals, the opposition was divided and they kept lying to the people. Once anyone of them would accept power the rest would not have anything to do with him anymore. And I think there were all these elements put together. The government in the United States did not give a clear signal and continued with contradictory statements. In Great Britain you had the Labour Government that did not

know what to do. I talked to your ambassador in Washington, Peter Jay, and I suggested that the American and the British ambassadors in Teheran should go together to see the Shah because each of them went separately and said completely different things that confused the Shah. His Majesty has said it clearly in his book that he was very confused and did not know whether to believe his own ambassador in Washington or the American ambassador in Teheran. President Carter has also referred to this situation in his book."

**BBC:** As you say the Carter Administration was giving mixed signals, perhaps you could give us your perspective of how you saw the divisions between the State Department and the White House over dealing with Iran.

AZ: "I agree with you, there was a division. I think there was almost no policy because the State Department, the Secretary of State himself, either had no

policy or they were changing it all the time. In the White House, the President himself was a wonderful man but did not have the necessary geopolitical background. Zbigniew Brzezinski, the National Security Advisor, was completely different and the CIA had its own vision; so I think there was a total confusion amongst themselves."

**BBC:** What were they urging on you, what were they recommending you to advise the Shah?

AZ: "The President of the United States was asking me to tell the Shah that he should stand firm and that he should do everything possible to end the troubles. For instance the President wanted the Shah not to worry too much about the history of the human rights and yet in his comments for the press and in some official signals you could see completely different messages."

**BBC:** Actually we have here what



**President Carter had to say later on that year about the politics on Iran:**

*(The Voice of President Jimmy Carter:)*

*"I would explain to the Shah to maintain power in Iran and for the present problems in Iran to be resolved. Although there had been surely deplorable incidents of bloodshed, we said that we wanted to avoid the predictions of doom and disaster and wanted to see some solutions, what had not been realised at all."*

*AZ: "You see, here you see the President of the United States who said from the beginning that he wanted the Shah to stay and yet at the same time he was deploring what had happened. He said the same thing to me. He, as the President of the United States, came to Iran, made a speech and said Iran was the island of stability in the whole world and then he left and gave different*

*signals when he got back to the United States. One day he said something and another day something else. One day he was telling their ambassador something and the other day something different to me. That is what had been confusing to us all. "*

**BBC: Meanwhile you must have been very dispirited by the way the opposition was organising increasingly larger demonstrations and they were able to bring out people from all walks of life. It started off with some clergy supporters and then more and more middle class people. The very people who had benefited from the Shah's re-**

*the wind goes. But first of all I believe that if the Shah had not left the country the army would not have collapsed and if that had happened then we would have had different changes. Even if the Shah wanted to abdicate, the changes would be of such a nature that would not destroy the economy and ruin the country and the bloodsheds the misery that we*

*saw in Iran would have been avoided."*



**Shah & Ardeshir Zadeh**

**BBC: So what were you advising the shah? Were you telling him to stand firm?**

*AZ: "I continued to say and I advised him that he should try and meet the opposition. As a matter of fact three times I prepared lists of different individuals from all over the country as representatives of different sectors to come to Teheran and get*

**forms in the past were coming out into the streets and taking part in those huge demonstrations. This must have been very dispiriting.**

*AZ: "It was discouraging. Unfortunately everywhere in the world you have groups of people who change colour and direction and go wherever*

*together in Palace with the members of the Parliament and the Senate and that the Shah should come and say that he was tired and wanted them to discuss the situation and decide whom they want as the Prime Minister to lead the government. That they should choose and nomi-*



nate three and the Shah would appoint one of them at the head of government with the necessary authority. He agreed two or three times and again somehow his decisions were changed.

I then said alright if you do not want to do that then we should make a compromise with the opposition. This was a proposal I had made for a long time. At the same time I was against the idea that the Shah would leave the country and I told him many times and once in front of Her Majesty that if you leave, you will never come back. Once I was very mad and I told him that if you leave and if you think that your wife or your son could take your place you are wrong.

That was the night that General Heiser was coming to Iran and the Shah said it was without his permission and I was really mad and said either you arrest him or you kick him out of the country. How could a high ranking general come to the country without the permission of the head of state?"

**BBC:** General Heiser, as we know only later, was sent by the Americans for a rather strange mission. It wasn't clear whether he was there to help strengthen the military, to persuade them to dismount the troops and encourage them to stop acting against the opposition or..

AZ: "To be very honest with you and frankly speaking I do not believe that either he or the American government knew what to do because at the beginning there

was talk about Zbigniew Brzezinski at the head of the National Security to come and then there was talk about James Slazenger and then it was General Hague but they all refused the mission and in the end it came to Heiser. He came, in my opinion, essentially to help the army to stage a coup but in the end His Majesty was not happy. When he asked me about Heiser's mission, I said that everyone knows he is here and there is no more a secret and when he said that it was without his knowledge or permission I suggested again that either he should be arrested or he should be sent back by the same plane.

Secondly it was also true that the army generals were not happy either because they thought it as an insult that an American General would come to tell them what to do.

Thirdly there was a fight between General Heiser himself and the Ambassador of the United States in Teheran. I had met general Heiser in Washington earlier, many times we had lunch together and I had letters from him. I do not believe that his coming was helpful or that he himself actually knew what he was supposed to be doing."

**BBC:** Who was the coup supposed to be made against? Was it a royalist coup and if so to do what?

AZ: "I think it was in the mind of the Americans, at least some of the Americans, maybe CIA or the Defence Department or even some people in the White House that if the worse come to worse, given that the Shah was about to leave, that they could make a coup with the army, the same thing that they once did in Greece which we call the Coup of the Colonels to bring the king back and at the end the situation became even more complicated."

**BBC:** A pro-American military government was the result.

AZ: "If you do not have the support of a military which is royalist with the king on the top and in command, as His Majesty was, then the moment you want to get in their way the whole thing will collapse. This, I think, our American friends did not understand and underestimated."

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

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