



LEGEND OF A NEW DIPLOMACY

From Dream to Reality

by Professor Houshang Nahavandi

Nearly four decades after the fall of the monarchy and the death of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the last Shah of Iran in July 1980, the time for an objective regard of the events that changed the course of history has come. Almost every week or month there is a new book or document published on the last decades of pre-revolution Iran.

Ambassador Ardeshtir Zahedi, well-known to our readers and to the diplomatic community, has now completed Vol. III of his memoirs. This is a colossal work of some 900 pages and a supplement of more than 3'000 pages of original documents covering the five crucial years (1967-1971) that he served at the head of the Iranian diplomacy.

Zahedi, three times Ambassador to the Court of Saint James and to USA and one of the architects of modern Iran had much contributed to the peace and security of the region. Washington counted on him and his assistance in ending the Vietnam War and in reconciliation with China.

In anticipation of the impending publication of his new book, we asked Dr Houshang Nahavandi, former Chancellor of Tehran and Pahlavi Universities, writer and critic, to review the work for our readers.

The new volume of Memoirs of Mr Zahedi is about the five years (1967 to 1971) that he served as the Iranian Foreign Minister. There are historians who have regarded the five years of Zahedi as the "Golden Era" of Iran's foreign policy, a judgment to which I voluntarily subscribe.

Iran was respected everywhere. Iranians needed no visa to travel to almost any country. Iran was present and counted upon in crucial international negotiations. Washington needed Iran and its diplomatic credibility in negotiations for ending the Vietnam War or mediating to establish relations with China and the countries of the far east.

Iranian diplomacy was playing a crucial role in restoring peace, security and stability in the Middle East. No one was speaking anymore about the artificially concocted conflicts between the Sunnites and Shiites. When Saudi Arabia, the country that today is boasting of rivalry with Iran, was facing

internal problems, it was Iran who responded to their call for help, saved the country and restored authority.

The section on "Minister of Foreign Affairs and his Internal Problems" primarily deals with Mr Zahedi's relations with Amir Abbas Hoveyda, Princess Ashraf, SAVAK, a few other personalities or institutions. He also comments on the controversial celebrations of the 2'500th year of the Iranian monarchy.

Zahedi has never expressed any doubt about the importance of the event and the need for a universal homage to Cyrus the Great, the founder of the empire. However, he does not hesitate to express his all-out disapproval of the way the things were contrived and presented at Persepolis: the notorious luxury tents, the extravagant dinner reception with almost nothing Iranian in or about it, the abuses, the wastes.

The stories related to serious managerial differences, at times clashes, between late Prime Minister Hoveyda and Ardeshtir Zahedi, have for years been entertaining the imagination of gossip mongers, journalists and even our diplomatic representations. Hoveyda was not a man of direct confrontations; he had a fine taste for diplomacy, but also for gossips and rumours. We read much about all this but little about Hoveyda's intellectual capacity, his knowledge of international affairs and his command of several foreign languages.

Unlike Hoveyda, Ardeshtir Zahedi had no thirst for power. Ardeshtir deplores lies and is allergic to hypocrisy. When he does not like something or wants to criticise someone, he does it face to face.

From the moment the Shah unseated Hoveyda from the Ministry of the Court, to a few days before he was arrested, Zahedi did all he had in power to save the Former Prime Minister's life. Hoveyda believed strongly in his innocence, he also thought he could count on the help of at least some of the multitude of prominent Mullahs he had nourished from the almost unlimited secret funds he had at his disposition. The new leaders, turbaned or not, were on the front line asking for his head so that he might not have any chance to reveal their secrets and the dubious connections they used to have.

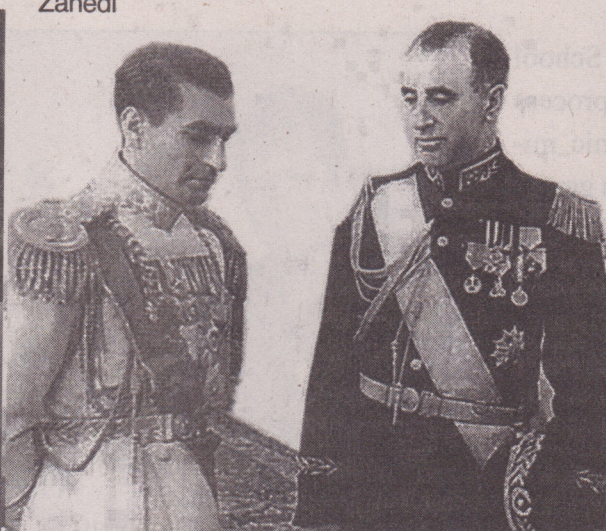
Ardeshtir Zahedi truly loves all Iranians, wherever they might be and of whatever creed, origin or faith. He feels proud and gets even excited when he hears about their achievements.

The prosperity of the nation, the preservation of its heritage



His Imperial Majesty Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi and General Fazlollah Zahedi

Professor Houshang Nahavandi



H.E. Ambassador Ardeshir Zahedi

are more relevant to him than the kind of government they have or may have. In international negotiations, Zahedi had his own method: direct and transparent with an approach entirely uncommon in diplomacy. In friendship, he is unswerving and dependable. Ardeshir's respect for the predecessors is well known but his love and admiration for his late father, General Zahedi, is beyond description.

He had affectionate relations with the Shah's first wife, Queen Fawzieh, the grandmother of his only daughter, Princess Mahanz. Despite certain unfounded rumours, Ardeshir had warm and friendly relations with Queen Soraya even after her divorce from the Shah. On his relationship with Queen Farah much has already been written and said, no need for more.

It would be a pity not to add a few words about the relation of Ardeshir and the Shah in the last days of his life. In the last weeks preceding the 79 revolution, the commanders of the armed forces encouraged by some eminent religious leaders and intellectuals referred to Ardeshir Zahedi as their only remaining hope. In the early days of the government of Sharif Emami, the Shah asked Zahedi to return to Tehran and be by his side. All believed that he was the man of the hour; the one who could probably lead the country out of the tumultuous state and the dangers it faced. Disappointment with Sharif Emami and his government was almost universal.

Ardeshir had a great ace in sleeves and that was the full support of the army commandment. He also had good contact with the Shiite hierarchy and personal relationship with leading Ayatollahs.

He decided to test the reaction of people. Accompanied by some of the commanders of the armed forces, he went on pilgrimage to the holy Shrine of Abdolazim in Rey, South of Tehran. Their welcome was warm. He then discreetly arranged for fifteen of the highly respected and well known religious figures to meet with the Shah and exchange their ideas. The meeting was successful and ended in a unanimous declaration of support of the regime by the participants. They condemned violence and terror that was perpetrated by the fanatics.

Everyone thought that this was a prelude to Zahedi's nomination at the head of the government. The Shah and the Queen showed no reaction to the public sentiments; they never offered the Premiership to Zahedi. The entourage of the

Queen who were now meddling in all the affairs were openly hostile. Some of them had their personal grudge against the Shah. The sick man had become too weak and no one feared him any longer.

The principle fear of the opponents was that with the support of the army and the clergy, Zahedi would be in a powerful position to put an end to all abuses and the widespread corruption in the circle.

The attitude of Washington was, as usual, paradoxical and unclear. The American Embassy in Tehran and the State Department in Washington D.C. had for long established contacts with the critics of the Shah, encouraging certain oppositions, consciously or unconsciously paving the way for the fall of the regime. On the other hand, Pentagon and some influential advisors to the White House like Zbigniew Brzezinski had their serious doubts and did not hide their consternation of continuing such approach. Everyone was waiting for the Shah to take his final decision. King Hossein of Jordan and King Hassan of Morocco were trying to convince him that if he stood firm against the oppositions and allowed the army to bring the situation back to normal - something which was within the reach - the Americans would change their mind and would have no other choice but to support him.

Later on, when the Shah was convalescing in Cairo, he confessed to me that he had committed a mistake not having listened to his friends' advice. In the end, the Shah did not offer Premiership to Zahedi. He was in a position and enjoyed such support that he could have taken the initiative by himself if he wanted. But Zahedi was not a man who would wage a coup or do something against the Shah's will. If the legitimate question of "Would he have succeeded if he was trusted with the mission?" be raised, my answer would be that at least his chances were much greater than anyone else's.

I shall be brief and conclude this review. I would say without the slightest reserve that he is a passionate patriot, an avid lover of Iran and Iranians; a man of faith; heroic in true sense; acclaimed and respected as the personification of the "Legend of Iranian New Diplomacy".

H.N.