

## Humayoun Mirza's Interview with

# Ardeshir Zahedi

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H.M.: Today is August 12th, 1993. I'm in the beautiful villa of His Excellency Ardeshir Zahedi, who has kindly agreed to talk to me about his associations with my father, during the time when my father was President. He knew him throughout that period, and until the time he died.

**Excellency, could you please tell me when you first met my father, your impressions about this meeting, and what you thought of my father at the time?**

A.Z.: I would be very pleased. I remember very, very vividly, when we were having a State visit, to India, and when we were in Bombay, the news of the election of your great father, President Iskander Mirza came. As a matter of fact, the telegram which has been prepared for His Majesty... which His Majesty asked me for handwriting. When we sent the congratulation telegram to the President, when we had the answer, it was not only the answer, but since we had to be back in Iran, and there were other plans, finally we managed that we would stay in Pakistan, which was at that time in the President's

House in Karachi. The first feeling I had to see this gentleman, was a man who for me was terribly interesting because he was so easy - he was such a wonderful host - he was so kind to everyone. It did not make any difference whether you are high-ranking or low-ranking person. And he would greet everyone when we came from the airport to the Government House, or the President's House; he would come to every single room, with Begum Nahid Iskander Mirza, to see whether everything is all right - whether everything is in order. And that time, he had also Aly Khan...

**H.M. Prince Aly Khan?**

A.Z. Prince Aly Khan there, which he was also invited. There was a luncheon, in the honor of His Majesty, which people of your Government, as well as ours, our Minister of Defense, [interrupted by a telephone call].

So, I was talking about the lunch. So, after that luncheon, we had a dinner in honor of His Majesty again in that beautiful palace of the President, which, you have - one palace you have the Foster Dulles, who had been in the

Southeast Asia, and he had come for the discussion. They had - they asked, and he came to see His Majesty. And that was a very interesting - and this is the most, actually thing which I was touched, because His Majesty had asked me that I would like to be alone, with the Secretary of State. So, when the President was coming, I very nicely said, "No, No, I want them to be alone." And also, there was another one, who was Ambassador to Iran, George Allen and he then became the head of the U.S. Intelligent (CIA) Ambassador Jones, I think it was. Anyway, the name I don't recall very well. I kept him out, and...

H.M.: You kept my father out?

A.Z.: Well, your father, yes, when he came, but also the other one.

**H.M.: Jones no... George Allen...**

A.Z.: Which I talked to the other one, the name... I would remember... I would tell you... but to go on, so after the talk, and then it was a delay on our departure, and then His Majesty came, and saw the President, and he very kind of became cross - he

said, "why didn't you let the President come in?" I said, "because I thought you want to be alone, and the President laughed and hugged me, and he said, 'Dont' worry, don't worry, I myself, well, didn't want to come, I wanted you to have a talk alone. So he didn't want me to be blamed, and he was very sweet. It was something - I did not know him before, and I was very touched. And I have seen, in many occasions, when he came to Iran, he was always like that, not only to myself, but also to the others. At that time, of course, I was a Chamberlain to His Majesty.

**H.M.: Oh, you were Chamberlain to His Majesty?**

**A.Z.:** ... to His Majesty. This is 1956, this is a time which my father had already resigned about a year earlier, and come to Switzerland, and I travelled with His Majesty, and the Queen Soraya at that time to India and then on to Pakistan. So this was one of the occasions. The next was when the President came to Iran, going to London, I think it was the meeting of Commonwealth, or some reason, I can't remember what it was. So he came. In order to have - to talk with His Majesty, we arranged a breakfast, because of different hours between Pakistan and Iran. We arrived at Theran airport, I think it was about six in the morning. And then, we were taking him to the Palace, which His Majesty, the Shah-in-Shah, before his arrival, before we went to the

airport, he and the Queen Soraya both came to see everything is all right for the breakfast - what usually the President would like to eat, and Begum - so they came, and they had a breakfast, and then the President and His Majesty went to the other room. They had their talks, and the President again, showing how sweet this man is, he insisted that he would like to go and see his father-in-law, Amir Taimur Kalali, who is a very distinguished man in Iran. And so after that, I accompanied them to the house of Amir Taimur, who went to see Amir Taimur, they stayed about an hour-and-a-half - two hours, and because of that, he insisted that His Majesty should not come to the airport, because he is not sure when he is finished, and the Shah was actually insisting. Finally he won - the President - and he explained, so the Shah accepted it, and I was actually, had the honor to continue with the President, and then from there to see the President at the Airport. So, what I had actually - what I was feeling, of your father is, he was not only a statesman, and a soldier, but he was a great human being. And whenever I saw him, in Pakistan, with his own people, which later on, Ayub and others who were working under him, he was very sweet to them, and he was very generous to them, and I think maybe that was one of the reasons they took advantage of his gentlemanship.

**H.M.:** I think that one of the first things of major importance

**that occurred while you were at the helm of power in Iran and my father was President, was the British-French landing at Suez, in the Arab-Israeli conflict. What was the position of Iran at the time, and what role did my father play in those discussions?**

**A.Z.:** Well, it was very interesting, because the day when the news of the Suez crisis came, we had already a meeting of the Baghdad Pact, and this meeting was going on in the Marble Palace.

**H.M.:** Can I interuupt? What was the Baghdad Pact, actually?...

**A.Z.:** The Baghdad Pact, I think it was between '55 to '56 - I may be confused on the dates, because the Iranian dates, and then the calendar of the Europeans, and this was actually, as you know, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, and Iraq. And the center of the Pact was supposed to be in Baghdad, which, later on, in the 1958 revolution against the Kingdom of Iraq, then it became CENTO the Central Treaty Organization, which the center became in Ankara. We will go probably go into that later, after the fall, but this is about '56 which is the Suez Canal crisis.

**H.M.:** Were U.S. and Britain also members of the Pact?

**A.Z.:** Yes, the U.S. and the Britain were the member of the Pact, and so this is maybe, it was not the Baghdad Pact meeting, because there were only the heads who were there - it was the

head of the Turkish, I think, it's maybe just because of that, as a matter of fact, I'm glad you brought it up, because it was President Celal Bayer, and the Prime Minister - a very charming gentleman, whom they killed, and it was President Iskandar Mirza, and it was King Faisal, and the Prime Minister of Iraq, it was Nuri es Said. So this meeting was going on until about three to four in the morning, and what it was, that the Iranians and the President himself, I remember, he was very much against the attack on the Suez, and this is why the British and the American Ambassadors were called to the Palace, and told them the protest of Iran vis-a-vis the attack in Suez Canal, and this the time of Anthony Eden, who was the Prime Minister at that time. And the most interesting thing is this, because President Nasser of Egypt was actually always saying that Iranians were the Baghdad Pact against them, and were doing a lot of attacks to the Baghdad Pact, because of hatred to Nuri es Said, I found out later, because I will tell you something which maybe has not come to be revealed in the history - and this is a terribly important point. I remember a few times, once, the discussion of President Iskandar Mirza, your beloved father, with His Imperial Majesty, and two or three times, he had mentioned that specifically, sadly I forgot the name of Ambassador of Pakistan, who was a very tall gentleman, who happened to be a very

handsome, happened to be your ambassador to Lebanon, to Beirut, and he has been a messenger between President Nasser and President Iskandar Mirza, and Nasser had suggested that he was willing to join the Pact, of Baghdad Pact, if Iraqi would not be in it. And that shows that, apparently his being against the Baghdad Pact, it was not because he was afraid, that, I mean, that was the excuse, it was his personal hatred, because later on, I noticed that often, which Prime Minister Nur es Said also was talking, it was against him, the grudge they had between each other, most probably also the Soviets, because he wanted to flirt with the former Soviet Union of today, those days, it was the Soviet Union or Russia, and this was, as you know, a protection against any intervention by the Soviets to any of these countries. And especially, you know, historically, how much the Russians or the Soviet Union, they dreamed to get into the hot water of the Persian Gulf, and through there, they wanted to go as well as to the West, to the Indian Ocean - as well as to the East, into the Indian Ocean, and into the West, to find their way to Africa, which they wanted very much, and that was their dream. So, this was an interesting thing, to see that Nasser was not against it probably, or at least he had pretended, as he said to you, these gentlemen - there were two brothers, one of them was in India and the other was in Pakistan,

after the Partition, very tall, very noble family, but anyway, since I am not good on the names, and I have forgotten after thirty - forty - something years, this is very interesting, which, I noticed President Iskandar Mirza, was among the ones who very much were against this, and he was very strongly talking in that meeting, which, it was actually all of them, I have to be honest to say - all of them thought this is against the principles and it should be stopped.

**H.M.: Thank you, Ardeshir. Since we are talking about the Baghdad Pact, could you try and remember, what were the events leading up to the breakup of the Baghdad Pact, which later became CENTO. This is basically...**

**A.Z.:** Yes, this is very interesting. As a matter of fact, as I said earlier, one of the things which the publicity and the work against the Baghdad Pact was, the Soviets never wanted to actually see that there would be a success by the Baghdad Pact. And they were making quite a publicity, not only by their own radio, but also by the others - from Bulgaria, from Romania - all this, those days known as the Iron Curtain countries, as Churchill said. Now, I do remember very well, because it happened that I was here in Montraux with my former wife, Princess Shahnaz, and she was pregnant. His Majesty was going to make a visit to Japan and China (Formosa), and I was supposed to

be with him as his Chamberlain, but because of the pregnancy of my wife, I did not go. From there, His Majesty went to the United States. And from the United States - and before getting to the United States - from Hawaii, he called us, that we should go back with him. And by this time, my father finally decided to invite His Majesty to southern France, so we would meet him there, because the Shah had to come to visit the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean, and Admiral Matt Anderson, whom I met, was the head of the Sixth Fleet. So what we did was arrange that, when His Majesty would come from the Rome airport after seeing the Sixth Fleet, to Nice, and we would meet him at Nice, and we would escort him to Hotel Carlton in Cannes, which he would be the guest of my father, and then we would go to Iran, which, on our way, we were going to Istanbul, which were going to have the Baghdad Pact meeting, and we were the guests of President Celal Bayer to stay a few days and go with his Presidential yacht to different ports of Turkey. Early morning, around five o'clock, I got a call when I was having breakfast with His Majesty. And the call was from Paris, somebody wanted to talk with His Majesty, as a reporter of one of the French newspapers. And, I did not want, actually, knowing who he is, to give the telephone to His Majesty, so I said, "His Majesty is not available, and I am his valet. What do you like - what do want?" And he said, "We

have heard something from Baghdad." I noticed this is too hot for me to answer, since I am not in politics, I am only his son-in-law and his Chamberlain, so I said, "Ambassador Entezam," who at that time our ambassador in Paris, and he was among my father's guests, "why don't you get in touch with him. And I didn't even want to mention my father, because I thought the ambassador should be the one. Well, they tried to get in touch with Ambassador Entesam, apparently they couldn't because poor Entesam had already gone to the airport, waiting for His Majesty. And we drove from Carlton Hotel in Cannes, to Nice airport, about 6:00 or 6:15, and I was driving the car, His Majesty was sitting next to me. Behind was my father and my wife, Princess Shahnaz who was at that time pregnant. And we got into the plane. While we were flying toward the direction of Turkey, we were almost somewhere on top of Athens, or somewhere around that area, we get a message from Istanbul, not to come here, but come to Ankara: "There is some important thing which we shall tell you." So we did. And we were wondering with this news of this newspaper, and the other one, we got late afternoon to Ankara. There, the President of Turkey, his Prime Minister, and his Foreign Minister, and the head of the Parliament, they were there, President Iskandar Mirza and Ayub, General Ayub or Marshal Ayub, he was under Iskandar

Mirza, he was there, and your Foreign Minister as well, and also, but we did not use the Iraqis - anyone from Iraq. We were taken right away from the plane to a small room at the airport, and His Majesty was briefed, what has happened, which was a coup in Baghdad. And by that time, of course, it has been later news comes that they have killed the King Feidal, they have killed the Prime Minister Nory Said, and the only one actually who has held on, fighting, with Kassem's army, was General Dorgastani, a very prominent general, and a very capable man, and very loyal to the King. And actually, what was interesting, was that... that time, we were very upset, how come it would happen, and actually, we wanted to know what has happened. Apparently, Kassem has said the excuse that he's moving the army from the port which is close to the Iranian border, to going to Israel, I mean, going to Jordan, helping other Arabs, that was the excuse coming to Baghdad, and then make a coup. And we were very upset that how come it could happen, at Baghdad, which was the center of the Baghdad Pact, with all the intelligence, and all this, and yet, we did not have any answers at that moment. Anyway, to make this story short, this was a long meeting that evening, about four or five o'clock in the morning.

**H.M.:** Who was in that meeting?

**A.Z.:** The President of Turkey

Jalal Bayar and his people, President Iskander Mirza and his entourage, and it was His Majesty the Shah, who had asked the Prime Minister Egbal, and one or two ministers to come from Tehran, who had not arrived yet. They were supposed to come. And by this time, of course, the situation in Lebanon was not very good, and Atabaki, who was our ambassador in Lebanon, and happened to be the husband of my cousin, he sent a message, and there was a gentleman, who was a messenger, Mr. Bahamdun, or Hamdun, had brought a message to him from the President of Lebanon, who was asking for help, because Nasser was apparently creating a lot of problems for them as well. At the same time, King Hussain was having a problem.

**H.M.: Of Jordan?**

**A.Z.:** Of Jordan. And of course, there was an agreement between Jordan and Iraq, that these two countries, if anything happened to one, the other one would be the head of the state. So what happened was, by this time, His Majesty asked me, this is about almost midnight - over midnight - if I would get in touch with my father and ask if my father whether he was willing to come and become the Prime Minister. Well, I got in touch with him in Cannes, his answer was...

**H.M.: That's General Zahedi?**

**A.Z.:** General Zahedi, and... who was a former Prime Minister. And his answer was, he will do it

on one condition, that he could attack Karkuk and Basra, so the people of Iraq would have the choice to choose whom they want and they would not be under the pressure of the coup d'etat, the group who has made the coup by the army. And at the same time, also, because of this, King Hussain could become King of Iraq as well, because he is, not only because of the relation, but also by this pact, which apparently they had before many months earlier.

**H.M.: Was Jordan a member of the Baghdad Pact?**

**A.Z.:** No, no, no. Never - and it did not want to be. So, but Jordan and Iraq, they had this agreement among themselves. So by this time, the Americans and the British representatives were not very keen about it.

**H.M.: About the plan?**

**A.Z.:** About the plan. So later on, again, I get in touch with my father, he said, "All right, I will do it, I will come and I will do it in my own risk. So, if anything goes wrong, I could be courtmartialled and taken, but by this way, it will have saved the people of Iraq, and Iraqi people would have chosen what they want," whether they want the kingdom, although the King is dead, or whether they want a presidency, or whatever, but it would be their choice, not the choice which is forced by the army.

**H.M.: Now, General Zahedi was going to take the Iranian army in there?**

**A.Z.:** Naturally, I mean, it was actually as if he become Prime Minister, he would have done that. So what happened, was by this time, whether it was true, our allies - American or British, whether it was true the intelligence, whatever it was that, I do not know, God knows, that the Russians had found out, and the message was that, if anything happened to Iran, then they would try to help, through Iran helping the Iraqi new regime. By this time, of course, they were sending Mullah Mustapha Barzani, who had received the rank of colonel by the Russians, which earlier they had created problems in the northwestern part in Iran, right after World War II, which they wanted to annex Azarbaijan, and make news, as I am sure you are familiar with that situation, and also, all these groups, which they went from Bulgaria in the north to help Kasem, and they were making, on Radio Moscow, and all were backing Kasem and Kasem's regime, and also President Nasser was doing that. So, the only decision was taken, at that time, was that President Eisenhower has decided to help the Lebanese by sending 15,000 troupes, which they want there, and it saved the fall of the government in Lebanon, and also the British would send the helicopters group to Jordan, which they would save if anything happened there. So, this was actually - and then from there, of course, after the meeting, we came to Iran, which, the reason I

say that, because again your father became involved in that, during the days which we were in Turkey - the days in the president's yacht, I remember very vividly every time our King would come down, always Ayub would salute him, and he was trying to be very polite, and he was very nice with him, and with Begum, as Nahid Iskandar was to him as well. But when we came to Tehran, and he was saying goodbye, he was saying to the chief of our guards, that, "First, I leave His Majesty to the hands of the God, and secondly to you, look after his health, look after his security," and all this. He left. And, since it was a few months later, the birthday of His Majesty, on the twenty-sixth of October, we received a group of honor guards, who were very beautiful, Pakistanis, very charming, very handsome - uniforms, and the musicians, and all, they came to celebrate - the Pakistanis celebrating the birthday of the Shah. And, just in that day, in that forty-eight hours, I can't remember it was before the night, or after, I think it was before the birthday, we had the coup in Pakistan, and we already have heard that President Iskandar Mirza has been forced and deposed from Pakistan to England. Because we were thinking, maybe he would like to have come to Iran, we would have welcomed him. And, of course,

later on, which I had the privilege to see President Iskandar Mirza, and Nahid Mirza, they were telling me how badly they were treated in that night of the coup, a few hours' time they had to pack, and how they had to be kicked out, I think you can ask that of the Nahid Mirza, and I am sure you have it in your memoirs, and his memoirs, but in case you didn't, in the future, I would give you, I don't want to bore you, I don't want to be too long on that.

**H.M.: Ardeshir, a couple of questions. One, you say that General Ayub was saluting the Shah and my father, and Nahid Mirza, so there was no sign whatsoever that he was planning anything against my father at that time?**

A.Z.: Well, I mean, now when I look at it, I think there was a plan. He was trying to get, because every time the President and the First Lady of Pakistan were coming down from the ships, he was standing and saluting, like a corporal saluting to the general, that way, so maybe this way, he was trying to attract the President, I don't know - God knows, because I was a very young chamberlain to His Majesty. But maybe that - it was something which he wanted to attract the President and also show him his loyalty. God knows, because only a few months later this happened. Now, I'm looking back, this is my

impression, rightly or wrongly, I don't know, and I am not sure, to be very frank and very honest with you.

**H.M.: The other thing is, that when the Soviets threatened, that if that plan was put into effect, that they would come in to Iraq through Iran...**

A.Z.: ... or help the Iraqis...

**H.M.: To help the Iraqis, what was the reaction of the U.S. and the British to that?**

A.Z.: Well, I don't think that they wanted to have any complications, and even first time, which they have thought it's not the right thing, or maybe the group, because it was also the heads of states which had to decide, and His Majesty. So whether it was that consultation with other allies, like Pakistan, Turkey, as well as Britain, because Britain was the member, but the United States was the observer, in CENTO - I beg your pardon - in the Baghdad Pact or...

**H.M.: CENTO.**

A.Z.: Or CENTO. So, that was the decision which His Majesty took vis-a-vis for his own Prime Minister. He had discussed his probably with others, and his thoughts were maybe - this is as far as I know. I mean, after all, I did not discuss the whole matter, especially my father being involved in the matter.

**H.M.: Thank you.**