

Time is right for the US to regain world trust

ZAHEDI PUTS TRUST IN OBAMA

The veteran Iranian politician Ardeshir Zahedi has expressed the hope that President Obama and his administration shall succeed in restoring America's trust and popularity worldwide and in the Middle East in particular.

In a wide ranging interview with Pari Abasalti, the editor of the Los Angeles based Persian weekly "Rah-e-Zendegi", the 80 year old former Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister and twice Ambassador of the Shah in Washington addressed the historical background of the rise and fall of America's popularity in the Middle East from the end of the Second World War to the end of the last US administration and welcomed the election of Obama as an beginning of a new era in the American's contemporary history, which offers the Americans a unique opportunity to restore their destabilized trust and reputation worldwide and especially in the hot spots of the Middle East.

Zahedi, who was forced into retirement and exile following the fall of the monarchy in Iran in 1979, still has his circle of veteran and influential International statesmen and politicians, including British and Americans.

He now discloses that prior to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, he warned Washington and London explicitly against the consequences of such adventure.

In the last two years Zahedi also seized every opportunity to warn the Us and her allies against any possible Israeli or US attack on Iran's nuclear installations.

"I may have deep differences with the clergy's regime in Iran", he once said, "I may even dislike them, but when it comes to the issues of principle, such as Iran's rights to access nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, then my

conscious not emotions guides me", he adds.

In his almost 25 year long political career, Zahedi met and worked closely with six American presidents from Dwight Eisenhower to Jimmy Carter. He also had close ties with Ronald Reagan when the latter was the Governor of California as well as with George W. Bush senior, before he became Vice President.

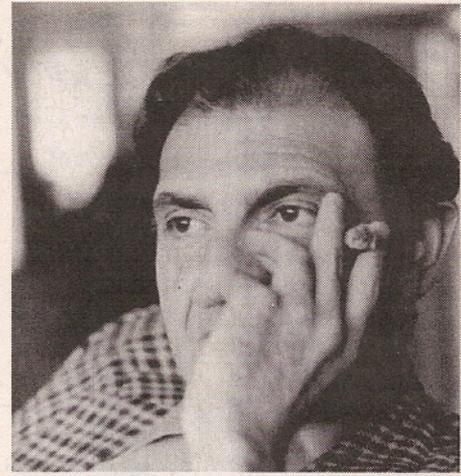
Zahedi, who closely followed the last US presidential campaigns did not ever hide his, to put it politely displeasure, but indeed showed irritation with the Republicans' foreign policies in the Middle East.

On one occasion, during the Republican Party's primaries in February last year, Zahedi seized the opportunity of Senator John McCain's remarks on Iran to lecture the Republican presidential campaigner on lessons of history.

The Senator from Arizona had expressed concern "over the Iranians ambitions, which are as old as history - a Persian domination of the region".

In response, Zahedi in an open letter published in the Herald Tribune challenged McCain's knowledge of history and Iran - US relations by stating that throughout the post Second World War era and up to 1979 the emergence and existence of a powerful Iran was the core corner stone of the US policy. "By assuming the fact that the aspirations of all nations, including those of the Iranians, do not change with the coming and the going of an administration or regime, I do not recall any historian as having recorded "as old as history" an ambition of the domination of the region by the Persians", the former top Iranian statesman observed.

"Having had the privilege of working closely with seven American Presidents from both parties from



Ardeshir Zahedi

1959 to 1979, with all of whom I am proud to say I had most cordial friendship, I never came across a similar remark by any of them, that my country at any time in its more than two and half thousand years of proud history and peaceful co-existence, had an eye on the neighboring territories or indeed the ambition of dominating them.

In his last extensive interview following President Obama's first 100 days in office, Zahedi explained why in his opinion did America become popular in the Middle East after the Second World War and how come it came to lose the trust of the people of this strategic region.

The following is an excerpt of Zahedi's interview conducted in Persian.

Explaining his views on Obama's election victory, Mr Zahedi said:

Obama was elected for several reasons. After the Second World War, America attracted attention in the Middle East because of the hatred of this region's nations against Britain, the Communists of the Soviet Union as well as the Fascists...

The people of this region regarded America as the cradle of freedom and democracy. I came to appreciate America's popularity and followed their freedom seeking ideas from the days when I was a student in the American University of Beirut, where I could closely observe the work ethos of the American university professors. Those professors, while teaching their subjects, were taking every opportunity to educate their students and in particular the Arabs and others from the Middle East in the principles of

democracy. They even used to encourage us to participate in demonstrations and express our opinions.

The US President during the Second World War Franklin Roosevelt had great respect for Iran. He took part in The Tehran Conference (28 Nov. to 1st. Dec. 1, 1943) with Stalin and Churchill. In that conference he described Iran as "The Bridge of Victory". After Roosevelt's death, when Harry Truman became the president, the issue of Azerbaijan arose. The Russian forces, which had occupied the northern region of Iran, were refusing to withdraw from our country's territory. Truman issued a warning and a strongly worded ultimatum to the effect that the US forces would enter if the Russians refused to withdraw from Iranian territory. Thanks to his stance, our country was not partitioned like Vietnam and Korea. As a result, our country's honour and territorial integrity remained intact.

Another event was the fighting over the Suez Canal when Eisenhower was the US President. At the time, Israel had joined Britain and France to occupy the Canal zone, but their action met with strong opposition from the USA. At that time I was attending a meeting of the Baghdad Pact held in the Marmar Palace in Tehran, where Iran's stance was of categorical support for Egypt.

As a result of that event, a famous international figure, Anthony Eden, faced strong opposition in the House of Commons and was forced to resign. This great gesture of America increased her popularity among the Arabs and other Muslim countries.

Despite the fact that America had voted in favour of UN Resolution 242 and despite the fact that the subsequent US presidents gave assurances to the Shah of Iran that they would pursue the "Even Handed Policy" in the Arab Israeli conflict during that period I was Foreign Minister and during my visit to Egypt, after the resumption of ties with that country, as well as my visit to Saudi Arabia and other countries of the region, I used to convey the Americans' assurance and was telling them that America was eager to see that the rights of the aggrieved party should be restored, but this was not realised.

Unfortunately, after the 1966-1967 the

Arab Israeli conflict has not ended, but rather the situation has deteriorated day by day. As I said, despite the fact that America voted in favour of the first resolution concerning this issue in the sixties when I was Foreign Minister, which had created hope among the Arabs, this hope was gradually dashed and similarly the regional people's love for America waned day by day. I believed and continue to believe, that if the problem of the Arabs and Israel had been resolved, we would not have faced any of the existing problems in the Middle East and the continent of Asia today. America became involved in the conflict in Afghanistan; and while that conflict was going on, it attacked Iraq. There is a famous phrase which says "one cannot pick up two water melons in one hand". According to the figures published by two well known American authors Linda Bilmes and Joseph Stiglitz in their book entitled "The Three Trillion Dollar War" (incidentally, Stiglitz is a Nobel Prize winner in Economics), as well as Rami George Khouri, from Friday 19th March 2003 when America attacked Iraq up to the present day, the war has cost America three trillion dollars. Furthermore, more than 4000 Americans have been killed and more than 8000 of them have been wounded in this war. America has also suffered heavy losses and casualties in Afghanistan. As a consequence, its credibility and popularity have declined day by day. This has led to a state of concern, dissatisfaction and anger in the region.

Yet, thanks to President Obama's policy of friendship and his remarks before and after the elections, some tangible change has appeared in the attitude of the people all over the world; and there exists greater hope and optimism towards America's new policy.

Let me give you a simple example to illustrate the importance of Obama's election victory in the most powerful economy of the world. When I was studying in America, I boarded a bus with a couple of my classmates in Washington. We went to the top deck of the bus, but we were told to go to the lower deck because the top deck was exclusively for blacks and the lower one for whites.

During John F Kennedy's presidency,

some concessions were made to the blacks. After his assassination, his successor Linden Johnson made further concessions. Of course, Robert Kennedy, who was Attorney General in John F Kennedy's administration, also played a significant role in this issue. Regrettably, he was also assassinated during his presidential campaign.

The situation continued to change in the wake of the struggle led by Martin Luther King, who enjoyed the support of philanthropists and those who believed in equality among all races. His mission was continued by Jesse Jackson. When I was Ambassador for the second time in Washington during seventies, I witnessed that several blacks were elected as mayors... And now Barack Obama has become President.

The current President of America is a man who is no stranger to the trials and tribulations of life. He was born into a black family in America. He later went to Indonesia and Hawaii to continue his education. His father (the same as myself, when studying in America) used to wash dishes! Thanks to his efforts, the course of his life changed. Barack Obama went to Harvard University to study Law. He gained extensive knowledge on the world's affairs. At the same time, him being elected as president has demonstrated the mentality of supporting freedom and democracy in America. His election victory showed what real democracy is. The will of the American people in this respect has gained the respect of the world for the democratic process in that country. During the decades when I served as Ambassador for two terms and as Foreign Minister for one term, I worked with seven American presidents. During those years, I never came across a situation, either in that country or anywhere else, whereby a president has inherited a legacy so much misfortune, dissatisfaction and frustration. I am hopeful and believe that he will be able to achieve success in both domestic and foreign policy. I hope that he will be able to sort out America's economic problems which have had repercussions on a global scale. I hope and believe that he will be able to sort out the problems in one of the most sensitive regions of the

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world, that is, the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, the problem of Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and other regions of the world. Incidentally, I must point out that during my years of service as Ambassador and Foreign Minister, I remained unbiased in my

and America did nothing to compensate the families of the victims. Whereas during the same period, when Iraq targeted an American ship in the Persian Gulf, Saddam and his government declared that an error had occurred and apologised. There was

there will be no peace. Fortunately a peace-loving and hard working popular politician, former Senator George Mitchell, who succeeded in settling the Northern Ireland dispute through patience and perseverance, has been appointed as the US President's

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duction of nuclear weapons and benefiting from nuclear technology for peaceful purposes is a global one. This includes Iran. Therefore this issue must be resolved at an international level.

I believe that the West and America need Iran, and likewise Iran needs America and the West. In this respect Turkey and India fall into the same category as Iran. Bringing these countries together opening the door to negotiations will lighten America's burden of dealing with over one billion Muslims in the world. If, instead of pursuing the policy of "divide and rule", they were to adopt the approach of promoting peace and friendship

Of course, I must say that the problem is that there is no coordination and unity of stance among the Arabs themselves. The same problem appears to exist in Israel. Nevertheless, I am very optimistic about Obama achieving success in his task.

As far as the present world economic turmoil is concerned, I must say that a group of selfish, deceitful, greedy and in particular avaricious individuals have been responsible for the situation in America, Europe, Asia and in general throughout the world. As a result the rich have become richer and the poor have become poorer. More and more people have lost their jobs and people in general

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