



## HOVEYDA, AMIR-ABBAS

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**HOVEYDA, AMIR-ABBAS** (Amir ‘Abbās Hoveydā), the longest serving prime minister in the modern history of Iran (b. 28 Bahman 1297 Š./19 February 1919; d. 18 Farvardin 1359 Š./7 April 1979; [Figure 1](#)). He was born in Tehran to a family of hybrid affinities and identity (Milani, p. 37). His mother, Afsar-al-Moluk, was a descendent of the middle-level Qajar clan and a devout practicing Shi‘ite. His father, Ḥabib-Allāh, came from a middle class family with roots in the newborn Bahai religion, but there is little evidence that he was a practicing Bahai for any part of his adult life. Furthermore, there is much evidence to suggest that he never tried to raise his children as Bahais. He was a tutor to the children of Sardār As‘ad Baḳtiāri, a powerful tribal chieftain; and at his suggestion Aḥmad Shah granted the favored tutor a title. Thus Ḥabib-Allāh became ‘Ayn-al-Molk. In the third decade of the 20th century, when the government decided to issue identity cards for its citizens, ‘Ayn-al-Molk (lit. “eye of the realm”) chose Hoveyda (“visible”). The ocular theme in both his granted title and chosen family name is particularly ironic, in that both father and son were known, amongst other things, for the opacity of their characters.

*Early childhood and education.* Amir-‘Abbās was only two when his father, by then a mid-level diplomat in Iran’s foreign ministry, was dispatched to Damascus. The young Hoveyda thus spent a great deal of his childhood and youth abroad, first in Damascus, then in Beirut, Paris, London, and Brussels. The long experience abroad left an indelible mark on Hoveyda’s character. In later years, in published segments of his memoirs, he wrote of his decision to



never again leave Iran and accept the drudgeries of exile (Hoveyda, “Memories of Youth,” p. 32). That refusal might have ultimately cost him his life. Another consequence of his long years of living in Beirut and Brussels was the fact that French became, in essence, his native tongue. He was also fluent in Arabic. In spite of his mother’s insistence on teaching him Persian, by the time he was an adult, he spoke his “mother tongue” with something of an accent.

He was four when his parents had a second child, Fereydun. Both young boys were much closer to their mother than to their distant, diffident, often brooding father (Fereydoun Hoveyda, 1954, *passim*). The dreaded patriarch was often traveling, and the work of raising the children was left to their mother, Afsar-al-Moluk. Amir-Abbas developed particularly close lifelong ties to her, while Fereydun became so deeply immersed in the question of the father’s role that he eventually wrote a book that offers an explanation for much of Iran’s history, and the revolution itself, through the prism of the psychological impact of over-dominant fathers (Fereydun Hoveyda, 2003). Amir-Abbas was seventeen when he lost his father, by then a retired member of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In Beirut’s French school, Hoveyda delved in classics of French literature and dabbled in Marxism; these early flirtations, as well as some of the friendships he developed in later years with renowned Iranian Marxists like Eḥsān Ṭabari and Iraj Eskandari (q.v.), gave Hoveyda a lingering reputation as something of a leftist (Kiānuri, p. 144; Kāma’i, p. 113). Iranian conservatives never trusted him, and the Left never saw him as anything other than a *boulevardier*.

In September 1938, not long after his father’s death, with a copy of André Gide’s *Les Nourritures Terrestres*—the veritable Bible of his youth—in hand, he arrived in his beloved Paris. No sooner had he settled there than he was forced to leave on account of a diplomatic row between Reżā Shah and the French government. For a while he lived in London and learned English; and finally he ended up in Brussels, where after three years he received a bachelors degree in political science from the Free University of Brussels. In the university as in high school, his grades were decidedly mediocre (Milani, pp. 37-68).

*Early career.* Hoveyda arrived back in Tehran in 1942/1321, to a city occupied by Soviet and British forces. He was soon hired at the foreign ministry; he also entered the army as a conscript officer. His avid interest in the world of



literature and his familiarity with the French new wave writers and philosophers gained him access to some of Tehran's most coveted intellectual circles. He befriended Šādeq Hedāyat (q.v.) and Šādeq Čubak; with the former he kept up a sporadic correspondence, while the latter remained his close friend till the end of his life (Šādeq Hedāyat, 1999, pp. 383-84, 389; idem, 2002).

His first diplomatic posting almost proved to be his last. Iran's newly appointed ambassador to France, Zayn-al-Ābedin Rahnemā, was the father of two of Hoveyda's closest friends. At Rahnemā's urging, Hoveyda was appointed to the much-coveted post of press attaché in Paris. However, the Iranian embassy in France was soon embroiled in an embarrassing controversy. Some in the embassy had used their diplomatic passports to engage in unlawful cross-border transactions in gold and currency. Hoveyda's name was mentioned in the leftist press as one of the culprits. Later on the popular *Kvāndanihā* reprinted the Marxist paper's allegations (*Kvāndanihā*, 12 Šahrivar 1325 Š./3 September 1946). Documents in the archives of the French foreign ministry show, beyond any reasonable doubt, that Hoveyda was in fact innocent of these charges (Archives Diplomatique, vol. IV de la série Asie, 1944-55). Though the Marxist paper that had originally made the accusation against Hoveyda printed at least two retractions, the charge somehow entered Iran's collective memory and cast a long and lingering shadow on Hoveyda's life. Four decades later, when he was fighting for his life in the Revolutionary tribunal presided by Šādeq Kalkāli, the infamous "Hanging Judge," the indictment included the charge of "direct participation in smuggling heroin in France" (*Kayhān*, 14 March 1979/24 Esfand 1357, p. 6).

Paris was not all bad news. It was there that Hoveyda made two of the most enduring friendships of his life. He met, and became a protégé of, 'Abd-Allāh Entezām (q.v.)—a colorful man of much erudition and long years of experience in the foreign ministry and one of Iran's leading Freemasons (Rā'in, p. 505; see also [FREEMASONRY iii.](#)). Eventually Hoveyda too became a Freemason (Rā'in, p. 357). Hoveyda's second friend was Ḥasan-'Ali Maṣṣūr, a scion of one of Iran's more powerful families. When Entezām was named Iran's new emissary to Germany, he arranged to take Hoveyda with him.

After serving three years in war-ravaged Stuttgart, Hoveyda returned to Iran. The country was by then caught in the fever of the movement to nationalize its oil and throw out the British. Mošaddeq was the man of the hour and Iran's prime minister. His two new appointees to the foreign ministry—first Bāqer Kāžemi and eventually the fiery Ḥosayn Fāṭemi (q.v.)—began a purge of the



ministry. Hoveyda used the occasion of his mother's heart ailment to leave Iran and seek permanent employment in the United Nations. It is doubtful whether he would have survived the Fāṭemi purges, had he stayed. Fāṭemi had been one of the chief accusers of the Iranian embassy staff in Paris and their alleged involvement in smuggling currency. There was, thus, no love lost between Fāṭemi and Hoveyda. His departure meant at the same time that he did not get involved, nor was he forced to take sides, in the fierce political battles that defined the Moṣaddeq era.

He settled in Geneva and began a peripatetic career as an officer of the UN that took him all around the world—particularly to new countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. He also occasionally visited his friend, Maṣṣur, who was by 1955 posted to Iran's embassy at the Vatican, and who repeatedly urged Hoveyda to return to his position in Iran's foreign ministry. After some original trepidation, Hoveyda eventually succumbed; and his first new post was Iran's embassy in Turkey, where Maṣṣur's father was the ambassador. Soon, however, the elder Maṣṣur was replaced by General Ḥasan Arfa', notorious for his unbending affinity for the ways of the military. Even in the embassy, he implemented and expected military discipline. Hoveyda was soon at his wit's end and about to resign, when 'Abd-Allāh Enteẓām and Fo'ād Ruḥāni—two of Iran's oil company executives—offered to help and transferred him to Tehran and to a managerial position in the National Iranian Oil Company (Milani, pp. 113-34).

*Rise to political power.* In spite of the initial resistance of some of Hoveyda's colleagues at the oil company who resented his sudden and meteoric rise in the tradition-bound hierarchy of the company, Hoveyda soon established himself as a capable manager and a congenial colleague (Ṣādeq Čubak, interview with author, 22 November 1997). Using a combination of savvy, subtlety, and Machiavellian guile, he emerged as a capable director. He began publishing a journal called *Kāvoš*, where he solicited essays from some of the leading Iranian intellectuals of the time. He also began to write about many of the themes that would later define his political creed. He talked of the necessity of pulling Iran out of its cycle of backwardness. He suggested training a new technocratic class who could replace Western advisors, managers, and technicians. (*Kāvoš*, 1960, various issues). By this time Maṣṣur was also back in Tehran, and together with Hoveyda he formed what eventually was called "the Progressive Circle" (*Kānun-e motaraqqi*). In notes for a talk given at an early meeting of the group, Hoveyda wrote of forming an



alliance with the shah, of a “conditional cooperation,” in which the goals of modernizing Iran would be accomplished under the shah’s banner (Milani, pp. 153-69).

In those years, American administrations, beginning with Eisenhower, had grown concerned about Iran’s stability (CIA, no. 36). They began to pressure the shah into a series of reforms, insisting in particular that he bring to power a new breed of political figures—less encumbered by the past, more trained in the ways of the modern world, and committed to the idea of Iran remaining in the Western camp. Hoveyda and his group were the perfect embodiments of this new type. Indeed, they were to be, according to the head of the CIA station in Tehran, an alternative to the National Front (Yatsovitch, 1988).

In late 1963, the “Progressive Circle” received an important nod of approval from the shah and soon changed its name to the *Irān-e Novin* Party (New Iran Party). Tehran was suddenly abuzz with rumors of the new party’s imminent rise to power. The wait finally ended in March 1964 when, on the eve of the Persian New Year, Prime Minister Amir Asad-Allāh ‘Alam bitterly and begrudgingly submitted his resignation (‘Ali-Naqi ‘Ālikāni, interview with author, 5 August 1999; Ardešir Zāhedī, interview with author, 12 January 2000) and Maṣṣūr introduced his new cabinet to the shah. Hoveyda was named head of Ministry of Finance (*Wezārat-e dārā’i*).

Hoveyda set out to reform the notoriously corrupt ministry. In his efforts, he was helped by a group of young, dedicated technocrats who brought a new sense of vigor and energy to the Ministry of Finance.

In the course of conducting his ministerial duties, Hoveyda had his first private audience with the shah. All evidence indicates that the king took an almost instant liking to Hoveyda. More than anything else, he seemed to know how to put the shah at ease. The two men shared a love of the French language and culture. The shah always craved the support of intellectuals; and in Hoveyda he found an intellectual of sound credentials, with an unending appetite for books and ideas, who could banter about the history, culture, and politics of the West with the best of his Western counterparts. He was, more importantly, also supple and accommodating to the king’s increasing appetite to concentrate more and more of the government’s daily functions in his own hands. Hoveyda seemed to have realized, as much by instinct as by experience, that the shah no longer tolerated “saucy minions” or independent ministers. The Moṣaddeq era had been, for the king, a bitter experience. The



humiliations he had suffered had convinced him to never again allow a charismatic man of independent political persuasions to become the prime minister.

As in his days in the oil company, Hoveyda put in long hours as a minister. He introduced computer technology to the work of the ministry (Jamšid Qareačadāgi, 1999). He ended some government monopolies, most famously on sugar. He agreed to streamline the process of making the government budget, hitherto divided cumbersomely between the Ministry of Finance and the Plan and Budget Organization (*Sāzmān-e barnāma wa budja*; ‘Abd-al-Majid Majidi, 1999).

*Hoveyda as the prime minister.* On Thursday 1 Bahman 1343 Š./21 January 1965, barely a year after reaching his lifelong goal of becoming Iran’s prime minister, Manšur became the target of an assassination attempt. Religious fundamentalists angry with him for allegedly insulting their religious leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, had organized the terrorist act. Ayatollah Khomeini vociferously objected to the fact that the Iranian government had agreed to sign an expanded version of what is commonly called SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement) with the United States, granting U.S. forces and American advisors full immunity from prosecution in Iranian courts. As the agreement was reminiscent of the infamous capitulation rights granted to colonial powers, and as Iran had, with full fanfare, ended all such rights under the reign of Režā Shah, even an appearance of their revival was a political powder keg, and the Ayatollah had just the right temperament and rhetoric to turn the issue into a national crisis. His opposition to the agreement led to his arrest and eventual exile, and his supporters assassinated Manšur in retaliation. The shah appointed Hoveyda to lead the cabinet, while Manšur was undergoing treatment. He was certainly an odd choice; he had little experience in government; he had not been close to the shah or any member of the royal family; but all of this mattered little, since the appointment was generally assumed to be only for a few days. When on 26 January Manšur died as the result of post-surgical complications, Hoveyda was, this time officially, appointed by the shah to form a new cabinet. Again, it was a consensus in Tehran’s political circles that it could not be anything but a short-term appointment (Milani, pp. 135-89).

Hoveyda’s long tenure as the prime minister can be divided into two distinct phases: first, the latter half of the 1960s, and second, the first half of the 1970s. In the first, he was full of optimism and energy; he met regularly with various



strata of society. He worked particularly hard to ingratiate himself with Iranian editors and reporters. He tried to bridge the gap between the intellectuals and the regime. He used his vast, secret discretionary fund, and his enormous network of friends, to establish ties with the clergy. He brought to his new post the same kind of populist style that had won him the support of his peers in the oil company. He eschewed the official limousine and instead used—indeed himself drove—a small *Peykân*, a new car that an Iranian company had just begun to produce. He continued to live in a small house he shared with his mother. Hoveyda was also a master of using small gestures of kindness to cement friendships and political alliances. No birthday, wedding, or mourning ceremony of friends, colleagues, or even enemies went without a gift or a note from the prime minister. None of these gestures was enough to dissuade his enemies from their attempts to dislodge him and take his place. A key to his success in thwarting these attempts was, according to the U.S. embassy in Tehran, his friendship with Parviz Tābeti, arguably SAVAK's most powerful official and in charge of internal security (U.S. Embassy in Iran, no. 560, p. 7).

The second phase was characterized by cynicism, a clinging attachment to power and its perks, and an almost despondent air of resignation to the immutable realities of the status quo. In the words of one of his close friends and confidants, toward the end of his tenure, he would “sometime admit in private [that] his approach to issues lacked innovation, his public promises carried little conviction, his political utterances were bereft of credibility. He was exceedingly tired, increasingly irritable and prone to impatience and bad temper”(Radji, p. 6).

What remained the same throughout the two phases were his economic policies. Hoveyda essentially continued the strategies that had begun under Manşur. A coterie of competent cabinet ministers and undersecretaries, in charge of planning, commerce, and industry began to implement a far-reaching set of programs that gradually changed the face of Iranian society and economy. Agrarian, premodern Iran gradually turned into a rapidly industrializing capitalist economy. As Hoveyda proudly announced in a conference towards the end of his career, when he took over, Iran's “GNP per capita was estimated to be around \$100 per annum. By 1977, this figure will be \$2,069. The projected figure for the year 2000 is \$6,025 at constant 1972 prices. In 1963, there were only 10 centers of higher education in this country with a total student population of less than 20,000. The number of universities and



centers of higher education in this country now has reached 184, with a total student body of 149,000, seven million Iranians of all ages will be attending some institution of learning . . . . Over forty thousand Iranians are attending universities in Europe, North American and elsewhere” (Hoveyda, 1975, pp. 447-56).

This rapid progress was purchased at a hefty price. Hoveyda was often criticized for further contributing to the demise and denigration of the office of the prime minister. He lived to rue the day he said that he was no more than a chief of staff to the shah. In one sense, his controversial statement simply reflected the reality of the time. In the words of a U.S. State Department report, the shah was “not only king, [but] de facto prime minister and in operational command of the armed forces. He determines or approves all important governmental actions. No appointment to an important position in the bureaucracy is made without his approval. He personally directs the work of the internal security apparatus and controls the conduct of foreign affairs. Economic development proposals are referred to the shah for decision. He determines how the universities are administered, who is to be prosecuted for corruption the selection of parliamentary deputies, the degree to which opposition will be permitted and what bills will pass the parliament” (U.S. Department of State, No. 603). Others point to the fact that, though in practical terms more than seventy-five percent of the total budget was controlled by the shah, Hoveyda had nevertheless, by the last years of his tenure, carved out for himself a fairly formidable niche of power and patronage. According to Fereyduṅ Maḥdavi, “in Hoveyda there was an inherent contradiction. On one level he was but a pliant tool of the shah; yet midway through his tenure as prime minister, his tentacles reached deep into all layers of Iranian society. He had become an institution himself” (Fereyduṅ Maḥdavi, interview with the author, 1999) .

Hoveyda was also criticized for tolerating, if not in fact fostering, censorship. Many held him directly responsible for the closure of sixty-three papers and magazines in the early seventies (Behzādi, pp. 788-94). The most important of these was *Tawfiq*, arguably the most successful journal of satire in modern Iran. The magazine was relentless in spoofing Hoveyda; and, according to at least one of the editors of the magazines, the closure was part of Hoveyda’s attempt to suppress any voice that exposed his exaggerations and false claims (‘Abbās Tawfiq, p. 21). Others have blamed Hoveyda for forcing his own hand-picked editors on some of Iran’s most important newspapers and magazines.



The most important and controversial of these forced appointments took place at *Keyhān*, easily the paper with the most circulation in the country. According to Moṣṭafā Meṣbāḥzādeh, the paper's owner and publisher, Hoveyda was relentless in pushing for the appointment of Amir Ṭāheri to the position of the paper's editor-in-chief (Meṣbāḥzādeh, quoted in Milani, p. 226).

Even in financial matters, where he was himself by near consensus beyond reproach, he was often criticized for tolerating financial corruption in some of those around him. His critics have even suggested that he took one step further and, as a way of ingratiating himself to the royal family, facilitated their illicit economic gains (Nahāvandi, 2003). 'Alam went so far as to tell the shah that Hoveyda was surviving by "throwing money" at the royal family, particularly the family of the queen. According to 'Alam, the shah ordered an investigation, but there is no evidence that such an investigation was in fact conducted ('Alam, III, p. 23).

As the oil revenue increased, as demands on his job increased, Hoveyda grew more and more tired and dispirited. His private life was in shambles, and he kept up with the routines of the day only by using a ten-milligram dose of Valium (Parviz Radji, interview with author, 1999). His cynicism, reserved and circumspect in the past, was now a permanent part of his political persona. The more he consolidated his power, the more he seemed bereft of joy, enthusiasm, or optimism at bridging the gap between the shah and his opponents. His vacillating character became the focal point for one of the main characters in Ebrāhim Golestān's daring, and brilliant novel and film, called *Mysteries of the Treasure at Haunted Valley (Asrār-e ganj-e darra-ye jenni; Tehran, 1974)*.

His world unexpectedly changed on 2 March 1975/ 11 Esfand 1353, when the shah suddenly announced his decision to turn Iran into a one-party system. The *Irān Novin* Party that had been, more than anything else, Hoveyda's own creation, was dismissed by the same royal fiat that had created it. The party had only weeks earlier held its most successful convention. Five thousand party delegates from all over Iran, as well as hundreds of foreign guests and dignitaries, had converged on the capital to celebrate the party convention. Hoveyda, ever watchful of the shah's sensitivity to an independent power base for the prime minister, was this time apparently so overwhelmed by the aura of party power that he had thrown caution to the wind. Reliable evidence indicates that the party's demise was related to its unusual show of force and to the shah's decision to nip in the bud any effort by Hoveyda to develop an



independent power base (‘Alam, V, p. 49; Šāhqoli, U.S. Embassy in Iran, July 1977). At the same time, the sudden death of Iran’s controlled “two-party” system might have been, at least partially, the result of the constant nagging and backstabbing that had been going on for years between Hoveyda and ‘Alam, the de facto leader of the opposition *Mardom* Party.

Though in private Hoveyda was harshly critical of the new party, *Rastākiz* (Resurgence), he nevertheless accepted the role of the party’s first Secretary. Furthermore, he set out to fill the party bureaucracy with his supporters and shape its ideology with his allies. It was all for naught. His days as a prime minister were nearing their end (Leilā Emāmi, interview with author, 8 March 1999).

*Hoveyda as minister of court.* On 14 Mordād 1356/5 August 1977, in one of his regular audiences with the shah, he was asked to resign. Jamšid Āmuzegār, a capable technocrat of dour disposition and little political finesse, was named his successor. The contrast could not have been more glaring. Hoveyda was a master tactician, supple and cunning, who used all means at his disposal to control his friends and constrain his foes. His extensive ties with the clergy, and his lavish use of the large discretionary fund at his disposal to keep many of the mullahs relatively happy, was just one example of his style of politics.

In the same meeting when he tendered his resignation, Hoveyda was offered the job of minister of court. For more than two decades, Hoveyda’s nemesis, Amir Asad-Allāh ‘Alam, had been minister of court and had used his position to ridicule Hoveyda, curtail his power, and conspire for his demise. Now ‘Alam was on his deathbed, suffering from cancer, and Hoveyda was the new minister of court (‘Ālikāni, interview with author, 5 August 1999).

In contrast to his long years as a prime minister, his tenure at the court was relatively short. The old established cliques there despised him; and, more importantly, the country was in turmoil. Hoveyda had been against the idea of Āmuzegār as the prime minister. ‘Ali Amini had been his candidate (U.S. Embassy in Iran, 1978/08.03). Though he often brooded about Āmuzegār’s inability to cope with the menace of incipient political crisis, he, in his official capacity, might have played a role in fanning the flames of that crisis. When the shah read the first call of Ayatollah Khomeini’s angry proclamation for uprising, he ordered the publication of a harsh attack on the character of the Ayatollah. Much controversy still surrounds the question of this letter’s genesis, authorship, and the responsibility for its publication. The king had



asked both SAVAK and Hoveyda to prepare such a letter. While SAVAK was deliberately delaying the preparation of what it considered an inflammatory note, Hoveyda apparently had no such compunction; he used a couple of his aides to immediately prepare and publish the letter in the 17 Day 1356 Š./7 January 1978 edition of the daily *Ettelā'āt*. If, as Joseph Kraft of the *New Yorker* suggested at the time, part of Hoveyda's motive in speedily preparing the letter was "to embroil the Āmuzegār government with the religious opposition," (Kraft, pp. 153-54) he surely got more than he bargained for.

As the crisis deepened, Hoveyda's strategy for solving it also changed. In the early phases, he wanted to bring into power a coalition government led by either the National Front or 'Ali Amini (U.S. Embassy in Iran, 1978/08.03). The Shah, still convinced of the invincibility of his army, refused to even meet with these forces; by the time he changed his mind, it was already too late.

The second aspect of Hoveyda's strategy was to curtail the role of the royal family in the financial affairs of the country. Corruption was, after all, one of the most important complaints of the opposition in those years. After many discussions, he finally convinced the shah to issue such a proclamation in July 1978; but it was too little too late. In the final weeks before the revolution, Hoveyda was amongst those advocating the use of the iron fist. He believed that before any more concessions are made the regime must re-establish law and order in the country. Concessions, he said, must be made from a position of relative strength, not absolute weakness. But the shah by then clearly lacked the resolve to make such decisions. His paralysis only deepened the crisis (Eḥsān Narāqī, interview with author, 11 March 1999).

On 9 September, the day after the army opened fire on demonstrators who had defied the curfew at Žāleh Square, Hoveyda was no longer the court minister. In a letter he later smuggled out of prison, he claimed to have resigned as a protest to the killings (Milani, pp. 328-32). Others claim that he was forced to resign because he was seen by the opposition as one of the major culprits in the regime's dark past. On the day of his resignation, the shah offered Hoveyda a chance to leave and become Iran's ambassador to Belgium. Hoveyda refused the offer. Many of his friends and relatives tried to convince him to leave the country, but to all his response was the same: I have done nothing wrong; I shall face my accusers in court, and I shall prevail. At the same time, he insisted that his mother's ill health, and her unwillingness to leave Iran, as another reason why he must stay (Leilā Emāmi, interview with author, 8 March 1999; Peyron, interview with author, 11 March 1998).



Āmuzeḡār’s successor, Ja’far Šarīf Emāmi set out on a policy of total appeasement; he not only tried to grant every wish of the opposition, but often attempted to anticipate their next demand and beat them to the punch by caving in before they even made it. The arrest of Hoveyda, on 18 Ābān 1357 Š./8 November 1978, decided in a meeting chaired by the shah, was arguably the most important gesture of appeasement by the government (Milani, pp. 283-309; Sa’ideh Pākrawān, 1998; Farah Pahlavi, p. 288). Even in prison Hoveyda was given a chance to escape. This time his friends in the French government had devised a plan to pluck him out of his prison—a guesthouse owned by SAVAK—and out of Iran. He refused their offer. Eventually, on the day of the revolution, he had his last chance to escape when his guards, fearing for their own lives, left him alone. Instead of escaping, he chose to surrender to the new authorities (Milani, pp. 300-307; Dr. Ferešteh Enšā’, interview with author, Paris, 2 June 1998).

He was transferred to the *Refāh* School, the headquarters of the incipient revolution. He was the highest-ranking member of the ancient regime to fall into the hands of the new victors. Amongst them, a battle of wills, and strategies, shaped around the question of Hoveyda’s fate. Some, like Mehdi Bāzargān and Abu’l-Ḥasan Bani Šadr, wanted to try him in a court of law, with a jury and attorneys. This way, they argued, the revolution can put the Pahlavi regime on trial and show the world the legitimacy and justice of its cause. Others, led by Ayatollah Khomeini, were advocates of revolutionary violence—at once purgative and punitive. Ultimately, it was the radical coalition that won the day. Hoveyda’s fate was put in the hands of Shaikh Šādeq Kalkāli, the regime’s most feared judge. Ironically, one of the most sophisticated members of the ancient regime was to be tried by the most brutal and bizarrely radical characters of the new regime.

The trial was a farce in style and a tragedy in consequences. The first session lasted a couple of hours, and began well past midnight, 24 Esfand 1357/15 March (the Ides of March) 1979. It was held in the same school where Khomeini lived. The second trial, even more bizarre than the first—with stories of telephones hidden in refrigerators and unauthorized helicopters flying low over the prison—took place at the infamous Qašr Prison on the afternoon of 18 Farvardin/7 April. This time, it lasted less than a couple of hours. The indictment was a rambling 17-count list that included such judicial gems as “ruining agriculture and destroying forests” and of course the ubiquitous “spreading corruption on earth.” The verdict was, even according



to the judge, a foregone conclusion before the trial began (Kalkāli, I, pp. 374-87). Minutes after Kalkāli read the verdict, he and his blood posse followed Hoveyda to the courtyard, near the room where the “court” had met; and there one of the posse, most likely a cleric, used a pistol to fire two shots at Hoveyda. His was to be a slow and painful death. He beseeched another member of the posse to “finish him off.” The man obliged and fired the third bullet into Hoveyda’s head (Milani, pp. 309-46).

His body stayed at the morgue for about three months—lest the burial become occasion for further attacks on his family or on his corpse. A physician by the name of ‘Abbās Garmān, an opponent of the shah’s regime, risked life and limb to afford Hoveyda’s family a chance to bury their dead with dignity. Hoveyda’s mother, by then bedridden, was never told of her son’s death. He was buried in an unmarked grave in the cemetery outside Tehran (Ferešteḥ Enšā’, interview with author, 2 June 1998).

*Character and personality.* Amir-Abbas Hoveyda was a true cosmopolitan, equally at home in Paris and Rome, Tehran and Beirut. He was, in private, according to his friend, Şādeq Čubak, “a militant atheist” (Čubak, interview with author, 15 February 1998); but in public, and out of the exigencies of politics, he feigned some measure of Islamic piety. He was overtly jovial and impeccably polite; at the same time he was deeply melancholic in his basic disposition to life. He was unfailingly dedicated to his friends. He was married for some years to Leylā Emāmi, the elder sister of Farideh Emāmi, Ḥasan-‘Ali Manşur’s wife. The sisters came from a distinguished Azarbaijani family being the granddaughters of the Emām Jom‘a of Koy, a famous cleric of the first decades of the 20th century. Even after their divorce in 1971, they remained close friends to the end of his life.

Aside from his official speeches and essays, he left behind fragments of an autobiography. Apparently, he also kept a daily journal, but no trace of it has been hitherto found.

He was a voracious reader, at home both in Agatha Christie’s detective stories and André Malraux’s writings. He loved the cinema, and was an avid collector of pipes and canes (Alamuti, p. 126). In his public appearance, he was always dapper, indeed a dandy (Chehabi, pp. 302-5), invariably sporting an orchid on his lapel.

To his many detractors, Hoveyda’s dubious distinction of having been the



longest serving prime minister in recent history was purchased at the price of the revolution that took his life, and brought the clergy to power (e.g., Pirāsteh, interview with author, 8 August 1999). His defenders point to his tenure as the “golden age” of the shah’s thirty-seven year reign (e.g., Najmābādi, interview with author, 12 July 1999; Fereydun Mahdavi, interview with author, 3 March 1999). He was a man of protean character and incongruous personae. Some think of him as a liberal intellectual who served an illiberal master (Radji, letter to author, 7 November 1997). Others dismiss his intellectualism as a sham and a pretense (Moṣṭafā Raḥimi, pp. 13-15; Moḥammad-‘Ali Eslāmi Nodušan, pp. 106-14). Few in modern Iran have been the subject of as much controversy and such contradictory judgements.

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