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**NOTES ON
EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE
BETWEEN
THE UNITED STATES
AND
COUNTRIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATION 1088

A SPECIAL REPORT BY MEMBERS OF THE U.S. ADVISORY COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS ON A TRIP TO EGYPT, SAUDI ARABIA, KUWAIT, THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, IRAN, AND TURKEY



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VII. IRAN

There are more students from Iran in the United States than from any other country in the world, and some 50 American colleges or universities have links with Iranian institutions. Exchanges of this volume are bound to create problems as well as opportunities. One of the principal purposes of our trip was to inquire into both.

Shortly before our departure we were permitted to see a pre-release copy of a report prepared by the American Council on Education (ACE) under a grant from the Department. ("An Analysis of U.S.-Iranian Cooperation in Higher Education.") Its conclusion, that the widespread involvement of American universities in the ambitious development plans of oil-rich Iran can benefit both sides if "academic hustling" and an "atmosphere of salesmanship" can be kept to a minimum, strengthened our belief that the situation merited more than passing attention from our Commission.

Our brief report which follows does not pretend to be as authoritative as that of the American Council on Education. The latter was based on a survey of universities in this country and a 3-week visit to Iran last May by a 4-member team of experts. We hope, however, that our observations, based on long, informal talks with many knowledgeable American officials known to us personally, and with a representative sampling of high-ranking Iranian educators, will usefully supplement those of the ACE report.

Our stay in Iran included visits to Shiraz, Isfahan and Tehran. Throughout we were accompanied by the Cultural Affairs Officer of our Embassy, who has been working closely with Iranian universities for four years. In Shiraz we heard the views of three American professors assigned to Pahlavi University, and met with USIA's American Studies Adviser. In Isfahan we met with the American Director of the Iran-American Society Cultural Center. In Tehran we had a session with the Ambassador and his Cultural Officers, visited the Iran-American Society's impressive Center, and had several long talks with the Embassy's Counselor for Public Affairs, a 4-year veteran of the local scene.

The contacts arranged for us by the Embassy with Iranian officials represented the acknowledged leaders of Iranian higher education. In Shiraz we had long talks with the Chancellor of Pahlavi University, and the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and held a round-table discussion with 20 of its professors. In Isfahan we talked with the Chancellor of the University (who was named Minister of Education shortly after our visit) and all his principal Deans; and we had a long session with the Dean of the Faculty of Foreign Languages. In Tehran we met with: the Executive Director of the Fulbright Commission; the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor of the National University; and its professor of American Government; the Deputy Minister for Scientific Research in the Ministry of Science and

Higher Education, who is also Co-chairman of the Science, Technology and Education Committee of the U.S./Iran Joint Commission, and two of his principal assistants; the President of the State organization for student affairs; and the Minister of Higher Education and two of his high-ranking aides. In addition both the Counsellor for Public Affairs and the Cultural Attaché gave large dinners for us at which we were able to supplement the information given to us by these authorities. We summarize below our main observations and recommendations stemming from these high-level talks.

General Climate for Exchange

In Iran the statistics almost tell the story. As we noted above, there are approximately 25,000 Iranian students in the United States. The Iranian Government supports in one way or another almost 50 percent of these students, since even those who begin their U.S. studies without Iranian Government help receive government scholarships after they have achieved a "B" average for two years. Less than 5 percent of this scholarship group fails, and 98 percent return to Iran because they are assured of good jobs when they do; so there is no "brain drain" to speak of, except of highly-specialized doctors. The reasons why so many Iranians wish to study here, rather than in Germany or England or Russia, are much the same as those given by students in Egypt or Saudi Arabia or Kuwait: they find Americans less reserved, more open and friendly; American university administrators give generously of their time to assure proper courses of study and provide close supervision; American programs are more flexible; the United States is pre-eminent in fields of interest to a developing nation; the number and variety of American institutions allows them to absorb practically anyone who wishes to study abroad.

The ACE report to which we referred above noted that "nearly a third of the 74 separate links the team discovered involved American universities working for Iranian Government departments or organizations." In addition, there exist a great number of informal links between university departments and between individual faculty members in the two countries.

The Iranian Government has in a number of other concrete ways demonstrated that it welcomes an almost unlimited exchange of people and information with the United States. Here are some illustrations.

--It has established, using the income from a million dollar endowment from the Empress, a Center for American Studies at Pahlavi University in Shiraz. The grant has enabled the University to augment its offerings in American

literature and American politics, and to initiate a course in "American Values."

--It made a Bicentennial grant of \$100,000 for the exchange of scholars.

--The National University has recently established an interdisciplinary Department of American Studies. It will provide instruction on a broad range of subjects--politics, economics, the land and the people--not just on standard subjects like literature and race relations.

--An Iranian professor has been despatched to the United States to write a book about it.

--The U.S.-Iranian Joint Commission has recommended an expansion of the Fulbright Program and has agreed to share equally in its financing. In fact, the Iranian Government is so pleased with the Fulbright Program concept that it has modeled on it an exchange agreement with the United Kingdom.

The prevailing attitude was summed up for us by a professor at Isfahan University; "I am a believer in mankind's interdependence, which implies the necessity for mutual understanding. If only for political reasons, Iranians should study American and British literature, and American studies should be taught in our universities. I therefore agree with Toynbee when he said, 'The United States has provided two great things for the world: the Marshall Plan and the Fulbright Program.'"

The situation regarding exchanges with Iran is, then, rather different from that in the Gulf Area. We do not need to encourage them, let alone augment them. What we need, rather, is to refine and improve them, for the sheer volume of U.S.-Iran exchanges presents, along with real opportunities, some real problems. The ACE report dilates at some length on these problems; we simply list here those which were called to our attention as of particular concern.

--All of the Iranian students who attend U.S. universities are not of the best quality. Those who do so on government scholarships are, as we have noted, almost invariably successful; but the 10,000 or more who are here on their own include many who cannot get into Iranian schools, or who are political dissidents, or who are avoiding military service, or who are, in short, simply not serious students. They cause problems at home and abroad, and make no contribution to the objectives of international educational exchange. (We discuss this and related problems below, under "Educational Brokers" and "Counselling.")

--The best American professors do not always wish to teach or do research in Iran because they suspect that they will not have as satisfying an intellectual experience there as in London, Paris or Vienna.

--The numerous arrangements between U.S. and Iranian universities border on the chaotic, fostering what the ACE report calls "academic hustling," with all the evils which the term implies. The Iranian Minister of Education has begun to bring some order out of this chaos and proposes a suprauniversity Board of Trustees to coordinate the overseas linkages of all its institutions; but until this is accomplished, these university-to-university arrangements will fall short of fulfilling the real desiderata of exchanges.

In short, all that glitters in the Iran-U.S. exchange picture is not gold, though happily much of it is. The conditions are certainly propitious for the development of a singularly fruitful relationship between the United States and a valuable ally in the Middle East. All the evidence indicates that a program of exchanges can contribute importantly to the achievement of such a relationship if it is carefully planned and effectively administered. It is up to the U.S. and Iranian officials concerned to eliminate the program's weaknesses and exploit its strengths.

The Educational Broker

In discussing above the probability that there were too many unqualified Iranian students in American colleges, we had in mind an aberration which, apparently, is largely confined in the Middle East to Iran. This is the appearance on the international exchange scene of the educational broker: the man who--for a fee--guarantees to place an Iranian student in an American college--which pays him a bounty for each body he delivers. We had been alerted to this character before we left Washington and had expected to encounter him throughout our travels; fortunately, we did not. He had been heard of in Egypt, and had practiced a little in the Gulf States, but only in Iran were conditions such that he had flourished.

As some of our contacts pointed out to us, the educational broker is not necessarily evil. It is possible that a person of high and honest motives can serve as a useful bridge for the deserving-but-uninformed foreign student to the reputable-but-ailing U.S. college. However, it is our clear impression that most brokers are more concerned with earning a tainted dollar than with promoting the ends of international exchange; some even go so far as to supply their victim with a bogus I-20 form, the "certificate of eligibility for a student visa." What normally happens, we suspect,

is that the broker: a) places a serious student in an inferior U.S. college; or b) places a dilettante in a respectable but failing school; or c) places a dilettante in an inferior college. None of these alternatives is conducive to the kind of meaningful experience international exchange is designed to provide.

Iranian authorities share our opinion. They are sufficiently troubled by the activities of educational brokers to have taken steps to control them. They now propose to separate the sheep from the goats by issuing a license to practice the trade, of course licensing only those whose motives are noble and whose expertise is demonstrable. We recommend that U.S. officials and universities do whatever they can to support the Iranian initiative.

Counselling

One obvious way to curtail the business, and the influence, of the educational broker in Iran is to make certain that every student who wishes to study in this country can get competent advice on U.S. colleges and universities.

But the need for more and better counselling transcends the need to circumvent the machinations of the educational broker. In Iran the sheer weight of numbers suggests that it is a subject of the utmost importance. Assuming that one person can counsel 20 people a day, we estimate that it would take 20 people working full time to advise all the Iranian students who seek help. The American Friends of the Middle East (AFME), the principal counselling agency, has six professionals on the job; USIS officers and Iranian officials also assist. But even so the total number of qualified advisers falls far short of the required number. The result is that some Iranians may enroll in colleges which are inadequate for their needs, or that too many are concentrated in 100 to 150 universities which are thought by Iranians to be "good."

Americans and Iranians alike have admitted the problem. The Chancellor of Isfahan University listed improved student counselling as one of five things which the United States can do to improve our exchange programs. The Joint Commission has recommended a joint study of the need for counselling and English language training; and the Institute of International Education has been asked, in vain, to establish an office in Iran. Clearly those concerned want something more to be done.

A solution to the problem appears to us possible: increase the counselling capacity of AFME. No CIA taint attaches to the organization in Iran. By all accounts it has done a first-class job, placing 2,000 students since 1973,

and professionally advising literally thousands each month. The Department has shown its confidence by contributing financially to its operations in Iran. We therefore repeat here our recommendation on counselling in Egypt, that a way be found to increase the AFME staff in Iran. As a corollary, we recommend that the enlarged staff extend its operations to Shiraz and Isfahan, where the demand for counselling is great and the supply is very limited.

We found a less clear picture of the selection and briefing of American professors going to Iran. We were assured in Tehran that Fulbright professors were well briefed, and the three we met in Shiraz and Isfahan had adapted admirably to their new environment. But we suspect the operative word here is "adapted," and that the success of these grantees is attributable more to their own character than to the process of recruitment and orientation which they underwent; for each admitted that he was unprepared for the living and working conditions which faced him in Iran, and each said more counselling before he left home would have been helpful. They were particularly surprised that they had not been personally interviewed before they were selected. A spokesman for the three implied that improvements in the selection process could be effected when he said: "Recruitment of U.S. professors must be designed to get people who are sympathetic to, and interested in, working with students who, because English is not their first language, are 'slow learners' in courses taught in English. A very special kind of person is needed here: someone who is interested in something other than a pay check, who wants to open student minds..."

Judging from the grantees we met, we would have to conclude that something is right in the process which selected and prepared them for Iran: they seemed to us to fit their own description of the ideal grantee. And yet their accounts of their first months in Iran raised the suspicion that it was more luck than good management which in these cases produced the happy result. We return to this general subject below in discussing the implementation of American Studies programs in Iran, and make there a recommendation similar to the one which we make now: that all agencies recruiting and briefing U.S. professors for service in Iranian universities review the process to assure that properly motivated candidates are selected, and that they know precisely what to expect when they reach their posts of assignment. We specifically recommend that personal interviews with candidates be incorporated into the selection process.

Exchange Programs

The State Department allocated \$264,000 in fiscal 1977 to promote exchanges with Iran. About \$150,000 of this was spent on "academic programs" (i.e. the Fulbright Program);

about \$32,000 to bring eight Iranian leaders to this country under the International Visitors Program; about \$18,000 to send eight to ten American specialists to Iran (and other countries in the area); about \$19,000 to finance projects recommended by the Joint Commission; and the remaining \$45,000 to support various private efforts which complement the Department's programs.

While the Department could always effectively use more leader grants than it can afford with its present budget; while the projects recommended by the Joint Commission seem to be generally worthy of support; and while there are of course innumerable private initiatives which warrant government support--we nevertheless do not recommend a large increase in the Department's budget for exchanges with Iran. There are, after all, 50,000 Americans in Iran, so the American presence does not need to be increased; it needs to be refined. Here, as in the Gulf States, we believe major financial support for programs of mutual interest can be expected from Iranian sources, and that the U.S. Government can best deploy its resources of men and money to encourage and facilitate the activities of others. We therefore believe that the sum of \$320,000 which the Department has requested for fiscal 1978 is about what is needed, and we recommend that the Department's budget request as a whole be approved so that this amount can be allocated for exchanges with Iran.

This does not mean that we received in Iran no suggestions on how to improve existing programs, on possible changes of emphasis, or on new projects which are worth a try. We did. Those we believe deserving of consideration are outlined below.

We turn first to the Fulbright Program. It clearly has a good reputation in Iran. Last year Iranian universities contributed to it the equivalent of \$124,000. Next year the Iranian Government will match the U.S. contribution of \$150,000. A Fulbright grant still carries with it, in spite of many competing awards, considerable prestige. The value of the program lies in the fact that it is the only "planned program" in the country; thus it can develop certain disciplines like American Studies (see below), library science, or education which are inadequately catered to by other programs. We commend the Fulbright Commission on its approach and recommend that it continue to use its resources in this concentrated manner. Within this general pattern, however, we believe there are aspects of the program which need examination, to wit:

--Although, as we have noted, a Fulbright grant has prestige and is generally expected to attract the best applicants,

we were told by people who know the program well that "U.S. grantees have not always been the kind we can be proud of." The following factors were suggested to us as possibly contributing to this result: a) stipends are inadequate; one professor told us, "A person who accepts a Fulbright grant expects to lose money. Perhaps a sliding salary scale or a means test should be established to determine an adequate stipend." b) there are not enough candidates for each professorship; this may be because the job opportunities are not widely enough publicized, and requirements for the job not clearly enough defined. We recommend that the process of recruiting, paying and orienting Fulbright professors for Iran be reviewed to see whether there is justice to these allegations.

--A minor related point. Candidates for lecturing grants are frequently persons who have originally applied for other countries and been rejected. The applications submitted to the Fulbright Commission in Iran indicate this. Thus, even though the candidate may be excellent, Iranian university officials may feel they are being offered an inferior product. It should be simple to revise the applications so that this impression not be created; we recommend that it be done.

--More follow-up of Fulbright grantees, both American and Iranian is needed. We recommend that the Department, the Fulbright Commission, the Board of Foreign Scholarships and our Embassy in Iran address the question.

--Most Iranians and Americans involved agree that a "long-term" lecturer gives more and gains more. Without clearly defining the terms, one American professor in Shiraz told us, "Of course, a lot depends on the discipline a professor teaches, but speaking generally, I believe a short term is too short." Iranian universities would like their American Fulbrighters to remain two years. What we saw in Iran leads us to believe that a 1-year tour is minimal and that a 2-year tour is desirable. Therefore, even though we are aware that the aim of Fulbright programs is to give at least some exposure to foreign cultures to many people, we recommend that its lecturers in Iran be encouraged to remain for two years.

--Housing in Iran was the most constant irritant we discovered among American grantees: it was either too uncomfortable or too expensive. Where, as in Isfahan, faculty housing was provided by the university, the grantee adjusted swiftly and happily to his work and to his new environment. The moral is clear. We recommend that the Commission do all it can to have acceptable housing available for American grantees when they arrive at their destinations.

--American professors usually teach undergraduates, and usually not very many--either because Iranian students lack facility in English or are not interested in what the professors teach. Their impact is thus less than it might be. Two possible solutions suggest themselves: a) recruit Americans for courses in which a respectable number of undergraduates are assured; b) use them in graduate courses, where numbers may be small but the "multiplier effect" can be expected to be greater. We recommend that the Fulbright Commission review the use of its American professors with a view to assuring that they make the greatest possible impact on their academic community.

Our discussions with Iranian and American officials were not, of course, confined to the Fulbright program. They ranged over the entire field of official and private exchanges. Here are some additional observations which may be of interest to the people responsible for them.

--In recommending that Fulbright lecturers remain a minimum of one year in Iran, we did not intend to suggest that American specialists sent on short-term grants were not valuable. We were assured by Americans and Iranians that top-flight Americans lecturing on specific topics of interest to Iranians can be put on lecture circuits around the country and are highly desirable. In fact, not enough have been sent. We are pleased to learn that the Department plans to send a dozen or more to Iran under its direct and regional programs. We recommend that these plans be fully implemented; and we recommend that they be supplemented through USIA's Volunteer Speakers Program.

--American professors are also sought to guide and direct research projects. The National Scientific Research Council plans to give grants to both Iranians and Americans to participate in joint research projects. It strikes us as a particularly sound way to build lasting relationships. We recommend that other agencies be alert to opportunities to develop such projects.

--We have referred earlier to the lack of coordination in the numerous direct university-to-university arrangements which exist, and have noted the Iranian Government's intention to do something about it. We now add that we strongly support the principle of such exchanges, particularly those involving department-to-department relationships. They respond to expressed, rather than hypothetical, needs; and they avoid the danger of our trying to impose an entire system on Iran, when only certain parts of it are applicable. The ACE report lists many of these successful linkages. We call attention to just one which we believe can serve as a model for others; it

involves students going both ways, instead of only professors from the United States. Under it, the University of Texas and the University of Isfahan exchange six students a year. Tuition is waived by each university; the sending institution pays other costs; the receiving institution provides a tailor-made study program. We recommend that such arrangements, involving professors and students, be encouraged-- always in consultation with the Iranian Ministry of Education.

--The "sabbatical year" proposal we outlined in our discussion of the Gulf States was warmly embraced by Iranian professors who have studied in the United States. We recommend that they be considered for inclusion in it if it can be established.

--Provincial universities like Shiraz and Isfahan requested more information on audio-visual materials available in the United States, and back issues of American periodicals. We recommend that USIA help meet these requests.

--In Iran, as elsewhere in the Middle East, authorities are concerned about the training of doctors and nurses for their country. In Iran, however, the Minister of Education has done something about it. He is involved in the establishment in Tehran of an International Medical Center which will be sponsored by the Iranian Government. Its planning and governing board will include representatives of Columbia, Cornell and Harvard medical schools, with whom the Minister has been consulting. Instruction at the Center will be in English. We believe this major initiative of an important ally to solve a serious regional problem deserves U.S. support. We recommend that competent authorities in State, AID, the National Science Foundation, etc. consult with Iranian officials to see what help this country can appropriately give.

--There is a limited interest in Iran in American performing arts groups. Our officers there believe occasional visits by important American companies are desirable, as a demonstration to Iran that we consider it a country which can appreciate the best of our cultural manifestations. They also believe that individual American performers who can perform with local institutions can be useful in promoting U.S.-Iranian communication. We recommend that these suggestions be implemented through the Department's Cultural Presentations Program.

American Studies

We have earlier in this report touched upon the development of American Studies in Iran as an illustration of the favorable climate which exists for exchanges. We now expand briefly on the subject because of the significance we think

it has for the promotion of our exchange objectives.

Perhaps the first point we should make is that Iran is the only country we visited which has established American Studies, as such, in its universities. Its experience will therefore be illustrative. In this connection we trust that those involved in similar enterprises elsewhere will take to heart the valuable collaboration between the Embassy, the Fulbright Commission, and USIA. The Embassy's Cultural Attaché was relieved of many of his routine responsibilities so that he could, in effect, function as an adviser to Iranian universities on educational matters, with special emphasis on American Studies. The Fulbright Commission collaborated by using its grants to promote the discipline; and USIA made available as a consultant its expert adviser on American Studies. These actions must surely have stimulated any latent interest in American Studies which existed, so that when the Empress set up her endowment of a million dollars to facilitate the establishment of a Center of American Studies, a number of Iranian universities were eager to have it. And it is instructive that the National University and Isfahan University (and quite possibly others) went ahead with plans of their own even though it was decided that the Center itself would be sited at Pahlavi University in Shiraz.

In its first year the Center had six students. Now 50 are enrolled in its courses. The final form of its program is still to be determined, though it now appears likely that a Center for International Studies will be developed, with American Studies as the centerpiece. The advice of USIA's expert is, we were pleased to note, being sought by the University authorities responsible for the Center's evolution. It appears to us that the Center is well launched and that it will contribute to better understanding among Iranians of all significant aspects of American life. It therefore merits the close, continuing support of American authorities and specialists. We suggest two areas in which we believe U.S. help might be particularly valuable.

--The first is in preparing prospective students to follow lectures in English. We have already cited the experience of the American professor who found that the pace of his instruction had to be slowed because of his students' inadequate knowledge of English. To this evidence we now add the following: the National University has felt it necessary to offer the students in its American Studies course two years of language study before they plunge into "American Studies" proper. While this is not time "wasted," it is clearly time taken from an indepth study of a student's primary interest.

--The second, and more immediate, is in the recruitment

of American professors. The source of supply of fully qualified professors in the field of American Studies is limited, and the demand for them abroad is, happily, increasing. The urgency of the problem was dramatized last year, when the normal procedures failed to elicit completely acceptable candidates for Iran, as well as for several other countries. One weakness in the procedure, we understand, is that which we referred to in our discussion of the Fulbright Program: that available positions are not adequately delineated and publicized. The situation in Iran was saved by the personal efforts of those who felt a particular responsibility for the program, but the experience points up the need for the establishment of procedures which will guarantee the best available talent for important Centers, like that at Pahlavi University. We recommend that the Department and the Committee for the International Exchange of Scholars (CIES) undertake a review of present recruiting procedure, giving special attention to ways of improving the announcements about posts available to American Studies specialists.

English Teaching

We have twice in this report alluded to the inadequacy in Iran of instruction in English. This conclusion is based on the statements of Iranian officials as well as of American professors. For example, the Chancellor of the University of Isfahan told us flatly, "English teaching at the lower levels of our educational system is inadequate." An Iranian professor echoed this sentiment: "English training in Iranian high schools is not up to standard; it is quite inadequate to prepare students for study in the United States or for courses in English at Iranian universities. Yet no program has been undertaken to attack the problem at its base--in elementary and secondary schools." He added almost plaintively, "Why can't Americans help us in this?" We think Americans can--and should. We therefore reiterate here the recommendation on U.S. support of English teaching which we have made in the previous chapters of this report.

American Universities

Iranian students have never been sent to the American University in Cairo, and we saw no disposition whatever for them to attend it now, when they can afford to travel to the United States if they wish an American college education.

The American University in Beirut, on the contrary, has trained many Iranians, and they remain loyal to it. But now Iran is equipped to train many more of its own students, even at the graduate level, and is doing so. We think it highly unlikely that in the years ahead Iran will send an appreciable number of students there, or will support the institution financially.