Foundation for Iranian Studies

Program of Oral History

RICHARD ARNDT

Foundation for Iranian Studies

Program of Oral History

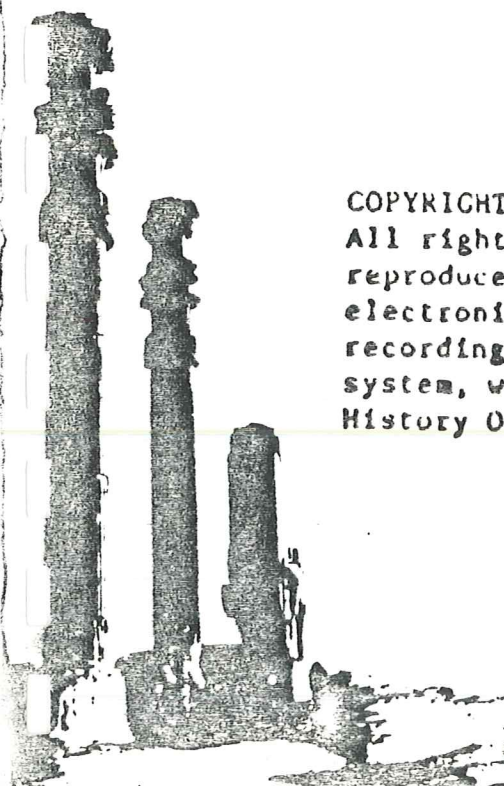
RICHARD ARNDT

RESTRICTED

INTERVIEWEE: RICHARD ARNDT

INTERVIEWER: WILLIAM BURR

WASHINGTON, D.C.: MAY 9 and 27, and JULY 25, 1988



4801 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Suite 670
Washington, D.C. 20016, Telephone: (202) 686-1224

PREFACE

This manuscript is the product of a series of tape-recorded interviews conducted for the Oral History Program of Foundation for Iranian Studies by William Burr with Richard Arndt in Washington, D.C. in May 9 and 27, and July 25, 1988.

Readers of this Oral History memoir should bear in mind that it is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, narrator and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. Foundation for Iranian Studies is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein.

VA

Interviewee: Richard T. Arndt

Interviewer: William Burr

May 9, 1988

Session #1

Washington, D. C.

Q: The following interview with Richard Arndt by William Burr took place in Washington, D.C. on May 9, 1988. The interview is part of a joint project by the Columbia University Oral History Research Office and the Foundation for Iranian Studies.

Dr. Arndt, can you tell me something about your early background, such as where you were born and raised?

Arndt: I was born in Philadelphia and raised in northern New Jersey. I went to high school in Englewood, New Jersey and was a scholarship student at Princeton. I got there in July, 1945, when the military was still on the campus. Graduated in February of '49, I knocked around for a while. I majored in French literature, by the way. That's part of the theme here. Knocked around for a while, worked on the BERGEN EVENING RECORD in Hackensack, New Jersey, and in the fall of 1949 went off to France on a Fulbright, the first year there were Fulbright students in France. That began my long-term love affair with France, which is part of the story of my relationship with Iran, because I obviously rode on that particular carpet in my Iran years.

When I came back from France in 1950 the Korean War was on. I was declared 4F because I had asthma, and I decided to go back to graduate school. I couldn't afford it,

so I worked nights in a garage and went to Columbia during the day, a couple of times a week. And then began full-time at Columbia that-- could it have been that Fall? '51-'52, I guess, yes. Got my master's in French literature, in August 1952. Went out and taught in a prep school for a year in Pennsylvania. Married a friend from France, from Dijon, and came back to New York to Columbia in 1953 and began teaching at Columbia University. I taught at Columbia University until 1961, and I got my doctorate in '59. I was Assistant Professor of French, and taught in their Humanities Division as well. And in '61, in the Kennedy years, like many others beguiled by the songs that John F. Kennedy was singing, I tried to join the government and managed to get into USIA.

I was interviewed, had my panel on the first of March 1961, and swore in on the 26th of June 1961. Did a couple of months in so-called training and was sent to Beirut. And in Beirut, fresh out of Columbia University not even two months, I was Assitant Culture Attaché. I functioned on the one side as a friend of the faculty at the American University, but more importantly I was the first American in the Embassy for years who'd been able to handle French at any level of sophistication. My French is almost bilingual, by the way--in fact it is offically bilingual, by government standards.

So, in Beirut I taught at the French University and I did all kinds of things; and it was quite an interesting two year period. The link to the Iran story other than my first exposure to the Near East, is that it was there that I met Ambassador Armin Meyer, my first Ambassador, who later brought me to Iran. And he was very supportive.

Q: What led you to join USIA as opposed to some other government area?

Arndt: Well, I was really working literature and the arts. I'd done my thesis on the eighteenth century, on Diderot as a novelist. What I know about USIA from my Fullbright year in France, was that it had to do with cultural affairs as well as informational affairs. I didn't have much interest in diplomacy, at the time, and I certainly didn't have expertise in Near Eastern affairs. But I was interested in foreign service, it's as simple as that, and interested in serving the U.S.

Q: Now how would you define the purpose of USIA at the time that you were with the mission in Lebanon?

Arndt: Well, you've got to watch out with questions like that, because right now I'm one of the people who has become a historian of cultural diplomacy, USIA and all that, so I could go on for hours and I should add that I am one of the major critics of USIA.

In my view, the USIA has always been an amalgam, ever since the Second War, of two different functions, which in most countries are separate, but in our country are together. On the one hand, the "information" function, which is a euphemism for the American way of doing the propaganda function, and on the other hand the cultural affairs and educational function. When I got into the agency, we were at an interesting period. In the late thirties, the two functions were separate. In the forties the War brought them together. In the fifties, there had been a great deal of emphasis on the cultural function. By that I mean not only cultural exchanges, the Fulbright program and that kind of thing, but libraries, English teaching, book programs, fine and

performing arts abroad, all kinds of things.

Ed Murrow, Edward R. Murrow, who was one of the reasons that we all wanted to join the USIA at that time, brought a different slant to it. On the one hand Murrow, who himself had been one of the officers of the Institute of International Education in the thirties and who was a friend and student of historian [James] Shotwell at Columbia, was a sophisticated intellectual in his own way; he had an understanding of the intellectual world-- the need for intellectual contact between the United States and the rest of the world. On the other hand, he chose as a deputy a man named Tom Sorenson, who was the brother of Ted Sorenson in the White House, whom he elevated to the Number Three position in the Agency. Tom Sorenson was probably responsible more than anyone else for adopting the language of the advertising world, creating for example the notion of what we now call target audiences, targeting our shots, and "carrying the message," and the like.

So that on the one hand Murrow brought, as a person, an increased appreciation of the integrity of the intellectual world and of intellectual connections between nations, on the other hand he brought in a man who probably more than anybody else refined--to be kind-- the propaganda art in its American style down to a narrower focus than it had ever had before. He made it increasingly-- I think he planted the seeds for a great deal of dissension within USIA that emerged later. I can remember him saying, for example, that libraries were nothing but carrots. You brought people into the library with the carrot of books, and then when you got them in there you hit them over the head with a message, the stick. And I remember thinking in 1962 that that was a pretty crude way to put it, to say the least.

But in any case, in Lebanon-- I never did quite figure out what our mission in Lebanon was. I was Assistant Cultural Attaché and I had succeeded a man who had built a reputation, I think quite unfairly, as a crucial contact with youth in the country. I never though he had done all that good a job. I followed on that in the first place, and what that meant was that I was in contact with youth, mainly at the level of university students. So I spent a great deal of time trying to figure out what the universities were doing and what kind of people were going to the universities, what kind of training they were getting and what kind of work was going on there, and how they were moving into the world of work and political life.

In the second place, I had a highly personalized mission, only because I was the only person who could do it, to build bridges to the French community. As you know, the Maronites in Lebanon were all educated by the French and the Americans, from the missionaries forward, had tended to focus on the others to a great extent. So I was really building bridges, and we did a lot in that connection. Remember that the Christian Maronites ran the country, so in effect the American educated were relegated to second-level power.

Lebanon, after all, in '61 to '63, when I was there, was only four or five years away from the Marine landings of '58. It was a time when we were trying to convince Lebanon that it had to be a bastion of peace and a hinge of stability in the Middle East. It was a time when a viable Lebanon seemed a reality. An ironic thought nowadays, but there it was. We used to say at that time that Lebanon would be the second country to recognize Israel. All someone else had to do would be to open the door and then Lebanon would follow. Well, it didn't turn out that way.

In any case, it was a very peaceful time and I developed a very close relationship to the Lebanese, to the French side in particular. Such that when I was transferred to Sri Lanka against my will in 1963, Ambassador Armin Meyer submitted a dissent cable, stressing that very peculiar knack I had for relating to the French Lebanese, who ran the country, after all. He said that sending Dick Arndt to Sri Lanka was like sending Mickey Mantle to the plate without his bat. It was a crude metaphor, but in all modesty it pointed out the fact that I had established a truly unique presence and perhaps a mission in the country that few could have followed. To him it was just like throwing that mission away.

Our overall mission, it seemed to me, as I look back on it, was to maintain stability, to try to convince the Lebanese that we were their friends, that our friendship with Israel was not exclusive and that there was balance in the relationship. Even handedness, I guess we would have called it later. I think we were trying to build a more stable Lebanon as a centerpiece, even a cornerstone perhaps, a small cornerstone of a stable Middle East in which we would play a useful role, useful to both sides.

Q: Who, by the way, was the Cultural Attaché? You were the deputy?

Arndt: I was his only assistant, yes. The CAO was a man named Russell Linch, who's retired now and living in Monterey. He later succeeded me in Tehran, as a matter of fact.

Q: Your next stop? When did you leave for Sri Lanka?

Arndt: Sri Lanka was called Ceylon in those days. I left Lebanon in August of '63. I think I got there around the sixth, if I'm not mistaken, of August. I did three years of residence in Sri Lanka, which again was a success.

It was a very successful situation. I was Cultural Attaché now. I had a Fulbright Commission to deal with. It was a small country, eleven million at the time, where if you got in an airplane high enough, you could see the whole island. A lot bigger than Lebanon, but at least I had the responsibility for a total cultural program, small as it was; more important, Sri Lanka was my initiation to the politics of culture. I think more there than in Lebanon, I realized that education, higher education particularly, had an enormous political impact on the nature of a society, and that the meaning, as far as I was concerned, of my work was essentially cultural, and that it fed mainly into the higher educational community. I think I saw, in that country that higher education was an enormously important political tool that the U. S. had the means to utilize in some detail and perhpas even to shape to a certain extent, to shape in ways that were useful to future relations between the two countries, certainly useful to U. S. foreign interests, and useful to relations with neighboring countries.

I also got interested at that particular point-- and I think this was a prelude to my going to Iran-- I got interested in the notion of manpower economics as the link between cultural and educational affairs and political development in the developing countries. When you looked at the kind of work that we could do with the Sri Lankan universities, it was developmental, and in order to make decisions about what you would do, it was important to know what the country needed, say, in terms of future

manpower. In other words, if you could invest in the chemistry department, let's say, at the University of Sri Lanka you had to know it, was that a better thing to help build than a journalism department or the economics department.

So it got me interested in manpower economics, and that was an extremely good preparation for Iran. It was the first time that I had thought of a single country as a political-economic (and cultural) unit, in which American cultural relations could make some kind of a contribution in developmental hence in long-range political terms. And that contribution then could become part of the U. S. relationship pattern with that country such that it would reflect in the long run on U. S. national interests.

So in '66 I was transferred to Tehran. It's probably worth noting that I had been in Iran very briefly in January of '63. I can tell you why it happened. The Robert Joffrey Ballet came to Beirut and I was with them for the better part of ten days. It was over New Year's, And they went on to Tehran, and when they got to Tehran, the company got together and bought me a round-trip ticket to bring me on to Tehran to be with them, because "they missed me," as they said. So I went to Tehran and I went down to Shiraz and went to Isfahan and I looked around. The Cultural Attaché at that time, Ted Wertime, who has since died, was a very powerful and wonderful man; we went hiking in the mountains. We did a lot of things, but it was there that I really picked up a feeling for Iran that was quite special.

I mean that I had a sense that this was a very mysteriously beguiling place, that it had some kind of rapport with me. I wasn't sure what it was. I remember I went to Shiraz by myself and went out to Persepolis, and I had been instructed by a friend in Beirut that the way to see Persepolis was by moonlight. And it happened to be a full

moon. So I stayed in the hotel over at Persepolis and snuck out into the monument at night by moonlight. It's one of those deathless memories. But Iran will always have a haunting and beautiful quality for me. So that when I went there in '66, contrary to many Americans, who went there with I would say anger, resentment, disdain and so forth, I already had a kind of a love for the country which I think showed in everything I did; I approached Iran with a great sense of wonder.

Q: Was your assignment to Iran by choice? Was it a matter of your choice or were you moved there?

Arndt: Well, it's a funny story. I was getting tired of being in Sri Lanka, and I asked one of my friends in Washington to get me out of there. As a matter of fact, I remember saying, do it even if I have to go to Vietnam! Can you imagine? That was in '66 and things in Vietnam were relatively calm, but I thought maybe there was a cultural job to be done in Vietnam. Well, as it turned out, the way the chips fell, they needed someone in Iran. They'd had a lot of trouble with the post for various reasons and they were trying to build a more positively Oriented team. And so I was the first member of that new team. The PAO [Public Affairs Officer] was Larry Hall and he needed some help to bring a little civility to what was a fairly unruly bunch of officers. I have always assumed that Armin Meyer had suggested me. And so it was not my choice, but I remember when it hit, when I got the news, I was stunned by the appropriateness of it. It somehow seemed like exactly the right place for me at that time. It was a big step, by the way, upwards. It was a major CAO [Cultural Affairs

Officer] post, whereas I had been in two very small places before that.

Q: Now before you moved to the country, did you receive any special training on Iran?

Arndt: Zero. It's as simple as that, zero. Nothing to add. In fact, I flew directly from Colombo. Did I overnight in Bombay? I don't think so. I flew directly from Colombo through Bombay. I guess I had a four-hour, five-hour layover in Bombay, and then I went on to Tehran, arrived there late at night. Without even a visa, can you imagine? So all things considered, I had absolutely no training at all. I arrived in August of '66. It seems to me it was around the 4th, I don't remember.

Q: Before I get to some of the questions about your activities in Iran, I have some general questions about your impressions of the country. What impressions did you get of Iran during your first few years there?

Arndt: Well, I don't know how you answer a question like that. It was very hot, and drier than anything I had ever known. The mountains were beautiful, but the city was generally brown, as was the embassy. My immediate impression of the people was that they were mistrustful, but it was easy to get past that. I suppose what you probably want to know more than anything else is what political impressions I had. I certainly had one impression economically it was a country with enormous, overwhelming problems, but that they were trying to do something about them, as far as I could see, that they were pulling together more or less and trying to solve them.

The society that I saw was a complex thing to talk about, but reminded me a little bit of Lebanon. Certainly the upper class reminded me of the Lebanese, although in some ways they were better educated and more intelligently realistic.

The universities were in terrible shape, the press was in terrible shape. There were just an enormous amount of problems, but I had a real sense that people at the top were getting ready to do something about it. Early impressions politically were really, I think, symbolized by a rally that I went to in the big sports stadium in Tehran, with two political officers-- Chuck Rassias, whom you should interview, and Larry Semakis. We went to this rally and there was this green and red and white flag and these masses of people performing military marches or whatever they were doing, marching up and down, highly regimented and dressed alike. And we were just all stunned by the resemblance to one of Mussolini's rallies. I had the sense of an enormous attempt at mobilization of the masses, on the one hand impressive, on the other hand very difficult and even dangerous in a country that had really no tradition of this kind of thing. There was that constant sense of what you might call threat or menace, having to do with enormous numbers of people, and an enormous percentage of illiterates. (the literacy level when I got there was something on the order of twenty-five percent). There were these unmobilized resources in the country, and on the other hand the sense that you could mobilize them fairly easily, probably with money, and get them to do quite amazing things. Yet the means of mobilization were authoritarian and, unfortunately, sometimes seemed to borrow various totalitarian stylistic tricks. So on the one hand it was a threat, yet a promise. On the other hand it seemed like an enormous human resource power, something could be achieved, if it were handled right.

The other impression I had was that our relationship, the U.S. relationship with Iran at that time was very special, and let me say a couple words about that. My understanding now-- and I think that's what I was being fed at the time-- went something like this. We didn't talk about the Mossadegh reversal in '53, except in evasive terms. We Americans were obviously trying to forget that. The impression I had from people-- none of this was written, none of this was documented, but some people had been there in the fifties and some people who even were serving with me, particularly a man named Sterlyn Steele, who lives out in California now, is retired, and who you ought to get at if you can, he's a very, very voluble, and articulate man. The impression I had was that after the reversal of Mossadegh we had really played not only a strong role, but almost a total role, that we were a tutelary power. And that rather interesting experiment, which involved the cooperation of great private-section empires like the Ford Foundation and others, was really in many ways a total U.S. effort to get the country straightened out and on a path towards growth. After all, there was a long history of American advice, going back to Morgan Shuster around 1910 and Arthur Millspaugh and his two missions in the twenties and forties later on, to straighten out Iran economically. Always the stress, of course, was on economics, with the assumption that politics and social development would follow in some unspecified way. I think that theory has a lot of flaws, when I look back on it. But I don't think we saw it them: we were certainly oriented to developing the economy and the assumption was the rest would follow. (By the time I left Iran in 1971, I was convinced that education was the key to social and political development, as well as economic, and I made that the focus

of my year of mid-career study at Princeton's Wilson School.)

In any case, it seemed to me in '66, when I got there, that we were at a crucial point in our relationship with Iran, we had decided to stop this tutelary power business and to persuade Iran to be a sovereign state, with which we would be partners, tutors.

The symbol of this to me was the phasing out of the AID mission, which if I recall correctly took place in the spring of '67, shortly after I got there. I was in on the phase down. In fact, there were two or three little programs and two staffers from the AID mission that remained afterwards, and they were transferred to my office. It was quite unique. It's never happened in USIA history and caused a lot of eyebrow raising, but it gave me strong and a certain additional dimension to my educational work that was very useful.

We were in a period, as I saw it, of saying to Iran, "We are no longer your tutors, you're on your own, you're going to have to hack it by yourselves. We're here to help in every way we can. We have limited resources, but we mean to be of assistance. We mean to be partners with you as a sovereign nation." And my sense was we'd been saying this for some time, I thought, a couple of years maybe, but with little conviction on our side and none on theirs. The shift flowed out of the Kennedy period, but the Iranians hadn't fully believed it.

Well, my sense was that in '66, and surely in '67, they <u>did</u> believe it; suddenly there was this moment when the two of us had every advantage, everything to be gained from working together as sovereign partners. That was, of course, the hallmark of the time that I spent there, and I spent four of my five years in that frame of reference: we were sovereign partners, whatever resource we could bring to bear should be able to

find some usefulness. If they needed advice, someone would more often than not come to me, and they would say, what do you know about-- let's say labor economics. And I would say, well, I don't know anything about labor economics, but I sure can find somebody who does. And they would say, well, why don't you bring somebody out and we'll see if we can find a way to program that person and we'd share the cost.

And so I had a sense, in the years I was there, of relevance, of usefulness, of participating in the growth of that country. It was an absolutely unique experience. I suppose, as I look back on it, there was some self-deception involved in it, but not all that much, as a matter of fact. It was a very peculiar thing. I didn't pinpoint in my mind the notion that economic development could not exist in a vacuum without social development and political development, but it was perfectly obvious to me, and to everybody around me-- to the Political Section for sure-- that there were structural political flaws which had to be overcome if the country was going to be viable in the long run.

One thing, for example, was information flow. We all believed that there was no way in the world that information flow could be repressed to the degree it was, without putting the country in the grips of obscurantism, of ignorance, of uninformed decision-making, of non-fact-based work and decisions of any kind. The result was that we really felt--and I think we <u>all</u> felt--that the regime could loosen up a little bit on information flow.

And, in fact, during the first four years I was there, the newspapers gradually, very gradually began to print a little bit more information. Not much, but enough so that you could really see it, from time to time, beginning to loosen up. Of course I think we

also learned how to read the newspapers more closely, to see the messages that had always been there between the lines. So that to sum that all up, the impression I had was of a moment in history that presented an enormous opportunity for these two countries to work together for their joint national interests.

Q: I have the impression that around this time the Shah himself was beginning to resent a little bit the former tutelary relationship you described. Did you get that impression to any extent?

Arndt: When I got there-- before I left Sri Lanka, I had met a friend-- CIA friend-- whom I'd known before in Beirut, and he gave me a little bit of a briefing. We spent about an hour together. We had lunch, I guess. And he'd reminded me of something that had happened just before I got there. A reporter from the NEW YORK TIMES named Tom Brady had printed a story about F-4s or F-5s, whatever they were then-- we were up to 5 or 6, as I recall-- and the defense of Kharg island, where they'd installed the oil distrubtion center down in the Gulf. They'd concentrated all their oil distribution center on one particular island and the Iranians were terrified, recognizing that any air force in the area could be there in three minutes. And the Shah was arguing that he needed these very powerful new American jets to defend himself.

And the reaction had been from the Americans-- and this is why I always give credit to Armin Meyer for resisting this-- was not on your life, you can't absorb them, you don't need them. There are other ways to defend that island and the oil installations. Your security is not threatened and we're not going to give you those planes. So we

were resisting very heavily.

I think that was resented by the Shah. The Shah expected us to give him everything he wanted and it was natural for him to expect that. It was also natural for the Americans, for people like Armin Meyer anyway, to say, no, Your Majesty, we do not believe you can properly absorb that.

You will recall that there had been a military mission, a survey back in the early sixties-- I think '62, if I'm not mistaken--

Q: By General Twitchell?

Arndt: Led by General Twitchell and with people like Alexander Haig and Richard Kennedy on it. Did you know Haig was a member of that mission?

Q: No.

Arndt: And Richard Kennedy was later Under-Secretary for Administration under Haig in State, was also on that team. And that team had counseled, as I understand it from General Twitchell, great restraint, based on the poor absorptive capacity of the Iranian military.

Well, by the time '66 came along, Meyer was marching to that drummer. He was restraining the Shah's natural instinct to want the moon and the stars, and that seemed to me to be an absolutely correct thing. Now, the Shah's resentment took the form of playing footsie with the Soviets, and the Soviets at that time had sold them I don't

know what-- trucks, as I recall, military trucks. And the Shah was using that as a threat, and that was the substance of the story leaked to Tom Brady of the Times. In other words, he was playing us off with the Soviets. Well, what else is new? I mean, that's a standard tactic, and I didn't have the impression at all that the Shah had any real resentment whatsoever, only a natural desire for more of everything we could give, with of course no strings.

I think the Shah, to the contrary, was very grateful to us for having kept him on the throne and having maintained our support. I think there had been some question in his mind about the Kennedy period. There was some question among certain Iranians of whether the Kennedy people had not pushed the notion of liberalization a little bit too hard, a little bit too fast for the Shah's judgment. But that, during our time, was not going on. We were really, I think, pacing it more or less as the Shah wanted it. Except with the military I think he wanted to go faster than we did, but I think we were doing what we could to keep the pace right.

I don't think he even resented the phaseout of the AID mission. There was the usual grumbling, but I think it was understood that it was a natural thing for us to do at this particular point. And, of course, we played it as a great compliment, that Iran had graduated from high school and now it could go on its own and blah, blah, blah. That kind of stuff. Part of USIA information mission was to stress that theme, that Iran was a successful developing country, it was moving rapidly, and so forth.

When I got there, by the way, the per capita income in Iran was something just over three hundred dollars a year. That was pretty low. But when I left, it had moved up rapidly, and it kept moving, of course, until the big bust.

So that "resentment" is not a word I would use at all. I think the Shah was beginning to see that he could not rely on the Americans quite in the way he had before, and he was beginning to cope with that fact and to understand that if offered certain advantages. He was beginning to understand that there were other countries in the world who might be helpful. The German were moving in. The French were there already, of course, had always been there. The British still in their small way. But I think the Shah saw the need to maintain better relations with his neighbors than perhaps he'd seen before. But all that said, there wasn't really-- I would never use the word-- resentment.

Q: Did you ever meet him, by the way? The Shah?

Arndt: Yes. I met him. I shook his hand several times and smiled at him and probably mumbled a few words, but it was never anything more than that. My late wife, who was also there though we were not married then, knew the Shahbanou pretty well, had several long meetings with her, in which they got down to brass tacks. I should tell you now that I acquired a Deputy Cultural Officer in 1967, named Lois Roth who later became the Director of the Iran-American Society, and in 1973 we were married. And so I speak to some extent for her as well, because we maintained very close contact on Iran questions from 1967 until her death in 1986. She was the perfect Deputy and everything I knew, she knew, and vice versa, so I sometimes will speak for something that she told me. But she, in any case, had several long, long interviews with the Empress.

We were also in touch with a lot of advisers of the Empress. The Empress had a little think-tank of her own, an intellectual team, some of whom are in this city right now, and who used to give her very thoughtful advice. We knew most of those people, and we always knew that if we had something that needed to be said, we could probably find a way to get someone to say it to her.

Q: Based upon your impression and maybe the reports that you read and what people told you, what was your assessment of the Shah? How would you characterize him? What was your reading of him?

Arndt: Well, first of all, I thought they were very lucky to have him, when you considered the alternatives. When you looked around you and you saw, say, Abdul Nasser over in Egypt and nobody worth mentioning in Iraq and chaos in Afghanistan and no real Middle Eastern leader within sight, the Shah looked like a pretty serious and stable force. So there was that.

And I want to stress that, because the rest of what I'm going to say is going to sound negative. But I want to stress the fact that he was in many ways a colossal figure. He certainly meant well. Whether he was as wise as he should have been at that particular time, or above all whether he was as profound in seeing the interconnections of things-- that is another question. That's, I think, where there was weakness.

I've never thought of him as a strong man. I thought of him always as a man who would puff himself up to look strong, as strong as he could. He wasn't tall, as you know. But he would always rise to his full height and throw his shoulders back, and I

can only tell you a marvelous story, that I don't see does any harm. It's a very touching story, told to me by an American portrait painter, who was invited to Iran, or sent out--as I recall, I think it was a gift from TIME Magazine. The painter had a few sessions or sittings with the Shah in which he asked him how he wanted to pose. And the Shah explained to him that he was the father of his people and that he wanted to look very fatherly. So the painter asked him to take a pose. Well, he took an enormously rigid pose, with one arm on one arm of the chair and the other arm on the other arm of the chair and with his most stern posture, looking, you know, tense. And the painter asked him if he thought that was the way a father looked, and he said, yes, that's the way the father of his people must look. The painter still wanted to get a little bit of relaxation in the pose, so he moved his arm around behind the chair, so that somehow the pose seemed a little more casual. As he did, he noticed that the arm he was leaning on seemed almost distorted in its size. And he asked him, he said, "Your Majesty, your arm seems to be larger than I would think an arm should be." And the Shah smiled with pride and said to him, "Yes, I do it with barbells. Would you like to feel?"

Very touching. And I think that's the first element that I would want to talk about. Obviously this was a young man who had grown up in the presence of a gigantic father. The old man, after all, had the power to serve his guests a cup of coffee so that they would die as soon as they walked out the door. And he apparently did it frequently. He had the power of life and death over everybody and he used it. He was a towering man. Everybody was terrified of old Reza Shah, and I'm sure the son was too. The son was not big, but he always tried to be as big as he could. He spent a lot of time at sports. He used to play soccer. He flew fast planes and, you know, he

drove his cars fast. He was a womanizer in his early days. I mean, all of these things sound as thought he was trying to prove that he was as macho as his father. And it always struck me that those were signs of a very fundamental personality flaw in him, that he always wanted to be as big as his father, and there was no way in the world he could accept the fact that he wasn't.

I think that explains many of his personal and public problems. Who knows? I'm not a psychiatrist, so I don't really know too much in detail, but there was built-in weakness in him.

The second thing is that his education had been seriously flawed. As my wife used to say, he hadn't had "the benefit of a democratic education." He had gone, in the first place, to a school in Switzerland, which was a kind of a secondary school for rich European kids. And he got a little bit of taste of Swiss "democracy," such as it is. I don't think it has any relationship to American democracy; it is a tightly run little country and he saw that. He couldn't have been there more than a year or two, but this experience must have shaped his vision.

And then he came back and they put him in a military academy. Now a military academy in Iran-- I had something to do with that later on-- was a school of obedience. It was nothing more. You learned almost nothing in the military academy of Iran. So that this man's education was truncated, especially in the civic and political sense.

I don't know what exactly he'd had to do with the French beyond the Swiss, but his French was excellent. His whole family spoke, in most cases, better French than English. But he had had this French thing, and my own feeling is that when the French educate somebody, in the Middle East anyway, the products are a little bit confused;

after all the French make their peace with monarchy a lot more easily than Americans do. There is a recognition in France of a certain kind of authoritarian democracy, "guided" democracy, that we would never condone in our own American thinking. That was one of the political flaws in the Shah, that he'd been exposed to the French and the Swiss more than to the British or to the Americans. That was unfortunate, but that was the person, we were dealing with.

So my impression of him was that he was a man trying to haul his country into the twenty-first century, or the twentieth century for that matter, from the Middle Ages, and he was trying to do it very rapidly. At the time I think every American in the mission thought he was doing it too slowly. If anything, we were simply impatient, and I confess I was among them. That was the general mode of feeling of all the Americans in the Embassy, myself included, that he really ought to get on with it faster. As it turns out, I think we were wrong. As it turns out, I think he should have been more cautious, for example about the religious element, to which he paid almost no attention at the time, no more than we did.

The speed, the pace of development was monstrously fast, on reflection. I remember every year Hoveyda used to set the targets for national growth at quite unrealistic levels, and then somehow or other they'd bring them in that way (although there was some question whether the statistics were honest). It was force-feeding. There was a great deal of haste apparently in everything he wanted to do, and very little understanding for the fact that you cannot build human structures faster than the pace of human growth-- you cannot build democracy without a lot of democrats, and democrats begin by being educated people. No doubt he thought he was making a

tremendous effort on literacy, but once again the Shah believed that you could teach somebody to read and then not give him anything interesting or useful to read and have it make a difference. The point is not to teach people to read, but to help people read available things that will help them grow and develop and learn. And that was something that he never simply understood; the books to which they had acquired access were simply not there.

So reading was an irrelevant skill in many parts of the country. Totally irrelevant and useless. So literacy was never much of a success, in that it did not matter-- so it became a question of reporting annual improvement, but it was only numbers, and no one counted those who had forgotten how to read. The big push for education came with the so-called university revolution in 1968, I guess, which we can talk about in more detail when the time comes.

There was a genuine commitment to moving fast, too fast. My general impression at the time was that the man had weaknesses, that he was insufficiently profound in his perception of the interconnection and interdependence of things but that, all things considered, he was very much, very much pointed in the right direction.

Q: Now when you were stationed in Iran, how much traveling around the country did you do?

Arndt: I did a lot of traveling. I used to go out to the major cities all the time. I usually would go out to lecture. I used to have a lot of slide lectures that I gave, on different things about the United States that were attractive and that could get over the

language gap. So I went regularly to Isfahan, I went regularly to Shiraz. I went to Tabriz a couple of times. I went to Mashad a couple of times. I was out in Kermanshah, Abadan, Alwaz, Khoranshahr, the Caspian. I used to drive out into the countryside, to Ghazvin and up to the Caspian, and we would go down to Kashan and along the desert there to the south. Did a lot of poking around, by car, whatever we could. And down to the Gulf, of course, and weekends to the mountains north of Tehran. I went down to the Gulf more than once too. I did as much traveling probably as anybody in the USIS mission, and so did Lois.

Q: Did you pick up much Farsi?

Arndt: Well, I had picked up a smattering of Arabic in Beirut; for Persian I used to have a Persian teacher come into my office three times a week and try to help. But there were two problems with it. One was that I had not time. Another was that I didn't really need it: the generation educated in Iran starting in 1925 and going through really until the fifties had been educated in France. Not only the upper class, but the people who were in charge, the elite knew French and they knew it very well. And exactly as in Lebanon, there was no American who could compete with me in this regard, so I had this unusual access. And if I simply followed the normal thing that seemed appropriate, I would never have needed Persian at all. Wouldn't have needed it.

Now I'm linguistically curious and fairly adept, so I picked up a lot of Persian, but it's really phrases and so forth. And then I had this game-- I learned a lot of

poems. I learned a couple of dozen lines or stanzas of poetry, which the Iranians cared about enormously, but I used them sort of in a really Machiavellian kind of way. I had a poem for getting onto a platform and a poem for getting off a platform, a poem for saying goodbye after a long evening, a poem for getting away early. You name it, I had a poem for occasion. I can still recit them-- and I have to say I have come to admire their beauty, their concision, their wisdom, their uniqueness.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE; BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE:

Arndt: I think the impression the way Iranians had of me was that I spoke a lot of Persian. There's no doubt that I could follow along pretty much what they were saying to me and sometimes to each other, but I simply couldn't work at it. My job kept me busy fourteen hours a day. I was going all the time and I simply didn't spend the time on it I should have.

Q: Now at the time that you arrived in Tehran, you said the Public Affairs Office was Hall?

Arndt: Larry Hall.

Q: Larry Hall. And how long was he there approximately?

Arndt: Oh, I don't remember. He had been there about a year, I guess. Maybe a

little more than a year, and he stayed a year or so more.

Q: And then Gildner succeeded him?

Arndt: And then Jay Gildner came and we had three years of Jay. And then we had, in my last year, a man named Dave DuBois, who was, I confess, quite inadequate.

Q: Was there a Deputy Public Affairs Officer?

Arndt: Under Larry was a man named Brian Bell. He stayed under Gildner, and I don't recall who replaced him, as a matter of fact. That person had very little to do with me, so I didn't worry about it very much.

Q: How was the USIA mission organized?

Arndt: Well, the PAO and his Deputy and the Executive Officer ran the post. The Public Affairs Officer tended to-- as I saw it anyway-- do two or three things. He ran the post, which I'll come back to. He kept the Ambassador happy-- he was our main contact with the Embassy, sat on the Country Team meetings and so forth, kept us informed about what we needed to be informed about, and we kept him informed. And third he kept Washington happy, he kept the money coming from Washington. Particularly with Gildner and Larry Hall, his job was to run the post. Now the post was divided really into three divisions. One was the Information Section, and they

pounded out the usual press releases and handled the press and all that stuff, put out a monthly magazine called Marzye-No. In Persian. And they did all that kind of thing. We had a string of Information Officers. Some of them were fairly good, some of them were mediocre, one was brilliant but in the wrong job, but they all did roughly the same thing.

Second there was the Cultural Section. And the third division was the Iran-American Society, which was an empire unto itself. So that the PAO had these three divisions under him. One of the questions had always been, inside the post, whether the Iran-American Society empire was part of the Cultural Attache's job or not. Well, when I got there, there were two clearly separate empires. There was a long history of CAOs breaking their teeth on trying to make them one empire. I saw no reason to mess with it. So, during my first year there, I didn't pay much attention to the Iran-American Society, because it was in the hands of the inimitable Sterlyn Steele and I thought it was running perfectly well and I didn't see it as central to my work. By the way, when Larry Hall briefed me the first day, I remember him saying, the main contribution that you can make here is to try to figure out what's going on in the universities and check in with them, because none of us feels comfortable with them. So I had a very special university mandate and that hardly involved the Iran-American Society at all, at least at that point.

When Lois Roth came on as my Deputy-- she served as my Deputy for two years and then went to the Iran-American Society-- the problem of coordination disappeared, because she had been my Deputy. We were by then like one mind, and when she was up there, she was obviously running it, but she was running it in the framework, in the

conceptual framework that the two of us had worked out for the whole U. S. cultural presence. And so it was an ideal relationship, and the problem of the separateness of the IAS and the Cultural Section was solved-- for a while..

You have to remember that the Iran-American Society involved at that time one enormous building up in Abbasabad, on land which the Iranians had given us. It contained at the time a restaurants, then two restaurants; two theaters, later three; three art galleries; a small library; office space, of course; stagecraft rooms; a Steinway piano, worth thirty or forty thousand dollars. And that kind of thing. But the Iran-American Society also held, as part of its domain, a large building downtown, in which English was taught to five thousand-- repeat, five thousand-- Iranians per day. Across the street from the University of Tehran, for reasons best known to history, we had decided to set up a Student Center for the University of Tehran, and the Iranians had allowed us to go along with it. The woman who ran it was a very interesting lady (she later decided to stay on and work with the revolution. She's still there, and many Iranians consider her a traitor. I think the votes are still out on that, but we'll see some day.)

So the Iran-American Society empire was enormous, and in that empire they, as I said, taught English. In fact we ran the whole thing. On the receipts from English teaching, because we made a profit, although we were charging less than the British Consul or anybody else in town. On the receipts from that, they put on a tremendous program. They had art galleries, they had theater, they had concerts, and they had lectures and seminars and you name it. And we had luncheons and something called the Returnee Professional Group that I'll come back to.

Meanwhile, down at the Cultural Section, it was essentially an exchange program operation. We were moving Americans into Iran and moving Iranians into the U.S. In different ways, on which I'll go into great detail, if you like. We had a small library downstairs. When I say small, it seems to me, as I recall, that it had something on the order of fifteen thousand volumes, but I could be wrong. It may have been smaller than that. And the library was its own domain, it had its own librarian and was fairly autonomous, was working with the Iran Library Association, which we had helped create, and so forth.

And then we had the Fulbright Commission, which I chaired, of course.

So my empire was basically this people-moving business. And then I was responsible for the conceptual framework. It was really up to me to design the overall plan of what we were doing there, how we were using all these resources, which was where things like manpower economics came in. The trick was to try to get a handle on that, and to see how the library and the Iran-American Society related to that-- in the natural order of things to try to figure out an overall program, matching available resources with the needs we saw.

Q: Who followed Lois Roth as your Assistant Cultural Attache?

Arndt: Well, it was funny. I never had a Deputy again certainly never one like Lois. I had always had two Assistant Cultural Officers, with Lois there was a fine woman named Barbara Spring. Then she got married and was obliged by our bizarre regulations of those days to resign. And two men followed them. One was a man

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Richard Arndt joined the Foreign Service as cultural Officer. After serving in Sri Lanka, Mr. Arndt was assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. Arndt's post in Iran covered the period of the late 1960s and early 1970s. He worked with the Embassy and with the United States Information Agency. Arndt supervised USIA's Iran-America Society, and numerous cultural programs sponsored by the Embassy and USIA to promote cultural exchanges between the United States and Iran. Arndt's recollections not only shed light on the workings of U.S. Embassy in Iran, but also are revealing with regards to U.S.-Iranian relations in the social and cultural spheres.

Corrections

PP. 12 and 44	Mossadegh	should be	Mossadeq
P.24	Alwaz	should be	Ahwaz
P.24	Khoranshahr	should be	Khorramshahr
P.24	Ghazvin	should be	Qazvin
PP.28,29,36,44, 49,82,85,91, 131,135,168	University of Tehran	should be	Tehran University
P.44	Jahan Shah	should be	Jahanshah
P.45	Aga Khan	should be	Aqa Khan
	Cyrus Sami'i	should be	Sirus Sami^{c}i
	Ali Aghassi	should be	^{c}Ali Aghasi
	Fazlolla	should be	Fazlollah
PP.45 and 98	Arya Mehr Technical Institute	should be	Arya Mehr University of Technology
PP.45,87	Farman-Farmaian	should be	Farmanfarmaiyan
P.68	Taquieh	should be	Taqiyyeh
P.73	Bakhtiari	should be	Bakhtiyari
P.83	Nemazee	should be	Namazi
P.84	Enquelab Daneshgha	should be	Enqelab-e Daneshgahi
P.88	Emayat	should be	Enayat
P.89	Tahari	should be	Tabari
	Parvi Saney	should be	Parviz Sane^{c}i
P.91	Sheibari	should be	Sheibani
	Hasemian	should be	Hashemiyan
	Shibani	should be	Sheybani
	Hassan	should be	Hasan
P.93	Abbur	should be	A.
P.100	Meshed	should be	Mashhad
P.106	Zia'i	should be	Ziya'i
P.119	Al-Ahmad	should be	Al-e Ahmad
	Amd	should be	And
	Mansour Ekhtiar	should be	Mansur Ekhtiyar
P.121	Azerbaijan	should be	Azarbayjan
	Zain al'abedin	should be	Zaynol^{c}abedin
P.122	Mussediq	should be	Mossadeq
P.132	Abdul Majid	should be	^{c}Abdol-Majid
P.141	Zia	should be	Ziya'i
P.151	Saffarjzadeh	should be	Saffarzadeh
PP.151 and 175	al-e Ahmad	should be	Al-e Ahmad
P.152	Shia	should be	Shi^{c}i
P.153	Hussein-yi-Irshad	should be	Hoseiniyyeh-e Ershad
	Sahab	should be	Shahab
P.154 and 155	Ali Shariati	should be	^{c}Ali Shari^{c}ati
P.160	Abdur Nasser	should be	Abdul-Nasser

Form H

Dear Dr. Grele:

This letter will confirm my understanding and agreement with the Foundation for Iranian Studies Oral History of Iran Archives and Columbia University with respect to my participation in a series of interviews conducted by the Columbia University Oral History Research Office.

1. The interviews will be taped and a transcript made of the tapes; the transcript will be edited by the interviewee and a copy of the revised transcript given to the interviewee prior to the signing of this agreement. The transcribed interviews will be maintained by the Oral History of Iran Archives and the Columbia Oral History Research Office, and the Hoover Institution.

2. I hereby grant, assign and transfer to the Oral History of Iran Archives all right, title and interest in the interviews, including the literary rights and the copyright, except that I shall retain the right to copy, use and publish the Work in part or in full until the earlier of my death or December 31, 1994.

3. The interviews will be made available for use by researchers at both institutions in accordance with Foundation and University rules and general policies for research and other scholarly purposes with ~~(no)~~ the following restrictions: that no one shall have access to this interview until January 1, 1995 or until the death of the interviewee, whichever is earlier.

Mahnaz Afkhami
Dr. Mahnaz Afkhami
Foundation for Iranian Stuies

Ronald J. Grele
Ronald Grele
Oral History Research Office

Very truly yours,

Richard T. Curt

Date 21 avril 1989