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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

FROM : AMEMBASSY, BAGHDAD

707  
DESP. NO.

March 30, 1953  
DATE

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

AIR POUCH  
PRIORITY

REF : See below

HEIRUT DAMASCUS  
APR 8 1953

SUBJECT: ~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ Des for Anti-Communist Activities among Students

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SUMMARY

The realization that recent student disturbances in Iraq have been to a large measure Communist-inspired has led the Ministry of Education to embark officially on a program of anti-Communist activities among the students. This program has presented the Embassy, through USIS, with an unparalleled opportunity to reach a priority target audience through Government channels. Accordingly, USIS has proposed to the Minister of Education four lines of action. Departmental cooperation in making possible the realization of these proposals will give USIS a unique opportunity to be effective in assisting in the solution of one of the most critical political problems in Iraq.

References: The following previous communications from the Embassy are pertinent to this problem: Despatch No. 383 of December 8, 1952, and Despatch No. 668 of March 19, 1953.

These despatches and the history of Iraq in recent years clearly indicate the power of students inspired to demonstrations by anti-Government elements. In the disturbances which have taken place since the beginning of October last year, the inspiration appears to have been largely Communist.

USIS Proposes:

As the Department is aware, USIS has long considered the students to be one of the primary target audiences in Iraq. At every opportunity, representatives of USIS have pointed out to college deans and to officials of the Ministry that the students were being used by Communist elements to create political disturbances. Representatives of USIS have further urged that the Ministry take positive, as well as repressive, measures in dealing with these disturbances. Within the last month, it has become evident that the Ministry is now prepared to take such positive action and is prepared to cooperate with USIS in such action. Enclosed with this despatch is a memorandum by the Public Affairs Officer of a conversation with the Minister of Education held on March 30, in which the Minister outlines the most recent disturbances and the measures he has taken and proposes to take. In this same conversation, he listened readily and indicated his interest in the four proposals made by the Public Affairs Officer.

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DDNewsom:gcl  
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PREPARATION TIME  
MAY 1953

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As will be noted below, he has indicated his willingness to take action in two cases and is considering the matter of the other two.

The suggestions were:

1) That the Ministry consider the establishment of an Institute of International Affairs. It was suggested to the Minister that such an Institute, affiliated with a college, could conduct courses in international affairs and, at the same time, could arrange and sponsor extra-curricular activities designed to channel the students' political interests into constructive discussion groups, lectures and organizations. It was suggested that a professor of Soviet Affairs could be on the staff of such an Institute and could assist in demonstrating to the students the nature of international Communism. As the Embassy indicated in its telegram number 1184 of March 30, a first step has been taken in this direction by the Ministry's agreement to the Fulbright grant to Mr. Albert Parry to study and lecture on this subject in Iraq. It is possible that the Minister may wish to pursue this subject further and to seek still another professor in the field of international relations.

2) That positive anti-Communist instruction be undertaken among the students presently in jail. It appears to be a fact that students jailed after the recent disturbances are subject to the strong influences of hard-core Communists jailed for long periods, who are prepared to indoctrinate newcomers with libraries, pamphlets and other materials smuggled in to them by outside comrades. The Public Affairs Officer has brought this fact to the attention of the Minister of Education and has suggested that if his Ministry or any of the other appropriate ministries wish to choose three or four thoroughly reliable people, USIS would undertake to indoctrinate these people and give them material which they could use in personal interviews, conferences and lectures with the jailed students. The Minister plans to discuss this matter with the Ministers of Interior and Social Affairs and to advise USIS as to whether such cooperation may be possible.

3) That Fulbright provide an advisor on extra-curricular activities. A part of the student problem stems from the fact that there are almost no extra-curricular activities in Baghdad's colleges. As a result, students flock to coffee houses, political centers, and other places where the only recreation is political agitation. The Minister readily agreed to this suggestion and asked first that Fulbright provide someone who could develop a well-rounded athletic program among the colleges. This request will be formalized by the United States Educational Foundation and forwarded in a separate communication.

4) That the Ministry undertake the dissemination of anti-Communist material among students. The Minister has agreed to this and has requested that the Public Affairs Officer forward to him material which is either suitable or can be adapted for this purpose. The Minister's interest, already reported to the Department, in having Arabic translations made of articles in the IPS publication "Problems of Communism" is a beginning in this direction.

The Minister of Education is a strong-minded and, for Iraq, an efficient administrator. The Embassy has in the past had differences with the Minister over the operation of the Fulbright program. Now, however, when the aims of the Minister and those of the USIS program appear to be identical, his desire for cooperation appears to be sincere and the possibilities of such cooperation great. It is sincerely hoped that the Department will give special consideration to the separate action communications which will be based on these proposals so that every advantage may be taken of the opportunities now presented to us.

*Philip W. Ireland*

Philip W. Ireland  
Charge d'Affaires, a.i.

Enclosure *ATT*

✓ Memorandum of Conversation

Department pass to

Cairo  
Beirut  
Damascus

*John*

March 30, 1953

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Participants: Khalil Kanna, Minister of Education,  
Government of Iraq  
  
David D. Newsom, Public Affairs Officer,  
American Embassy

In an interview requested by Mr. Newsom, the Minister this morning outlined events which have led up to the recent large-scale arrests of college students and to other measures which the Government of Iraq has taken. The Minister related the events at length because, he said, they had "international implications" in which he knew the United States was definitely interested.

As a result of the November disturbances, the Minister said, the students had gained an idea that they could achieve anything they wanted by striking. Accordingly, late in February, a strike broke out in the secondary school in Basra over the dismissal of a student. The Mutasarrif was told by the Minister to take strong action, but, instead, he sought to talk to the students. The strike continued for a week, without any settlement, until the Mutasarrif finally agreed to the arrest of the ringleaders, who were brought north to Abu Gharab. The other students returned to their classes.

Shortly thereafter, (the Minister did not give dates), a similar incident took place in Diwaniyah. The instigators were immediately arrested and there was no further trouble. The next outbreak was in the Higher Teachers Training College in Baghdad where, on the same day, two women teachers were insulted by students. The Minister personally visited the college and gave the students their choice of apologizing to the teacher or going to jail. They chose the former and the matter was settled.

Then, on March 10, a student insulted a teacher at the Primary Teachers Training College at Adhamiya in Baghdad. The student was dismissed and, the next morning, March 11, students of the college went on strike. The Minister immediately went to the Military Official in charge (martial law still prevails in Baghdad) and asked that he take action. The Officer said he would go and talk to the students, which he did on the morning of March 12. This did little good and, as if by pre-arrangement, small groups of students began to gather at the office of the Minister at about noon of the same day.

A total of 150 from several colleges finally gathered and demanded to see the Minister. He said he went to them and told them

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they had no business there and they should go back to their classes. "We represent the movement of students from the south to the north of Iraq," he quoted them as saying. He told them he would not be threatened by such talk and ordered them to disperse. Some of the others asked in a quieter way, he said, if they might talk with him and he agreed. They then crowded into his office and he asked them what they had to say. He said they told him they had a petition with their demands.

Having already heard what their demands were, he told them he would not listen to these demands. "If you want a new laboratory, different text books, or different courses," he said he told them, "I will listen to your demands, but you have no business with other matters." They then told him that they considered this a flat rejection of their petition and they would make him see their power. He then acted immediately, going to the Military Commander and the Minister of Interior, and calling the prison at Abu Gharaib. His request was that all the leaders and all students known to be participants in such demonstrations be arrested. Accordingly, he said, the Military moved during the night of March 11 and more than 200 were arrested. The order then went to the rest of the students that they had their choice of going to classes or going to jail.

The colleges resumed on Saturday and the Minister reported his action to the various Deans and told them that, if they felt that any student had been arrested unjustly, they could intercede on his behalf. The Minister said that some Deans did and that "five or six" were released. He did not indicate that any more had been released and, presumably, the rest are in jail.

With the colleges now quiet, the Minister said he desired to begin a campaign which would show the students clearly the difference between their proper "nationalist" demands and the demands of the Communists. He said he was convinced that the isolated incidents in the various schools were part of a general Communist plan to see how far the present Government could be pushed. "If I can demonstrate that the aims of the Communists are not identical with the aims of the nationalist," he said, "the nationalist will no longer be lured into the street by the Communist where the Communist quickly uses him for anti-nationalist aims." He indicated he hoped to do this by study groups, lecturers, and literature. Already, he said, in some of the colleges, the nationalists have lined up against the Communists. He indicated he was happy to have Mr. Parry come out under the Fulbright program to study the general problem of Communist propaganda. "I want Mr. Parry to work right with me as much as possible," he said, "to advise me on the best methods of showing the students the light on this Communist problem."

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Mr. Newsom indicated his approval of the Minister's stand and philosophy in this matter and stated that USIS was willing to help him in every way possible. Mr. Newsom suggested that an institute of international affairs might be organized which would help channel the students' political interests into controllable lines, both academic and extra-curricular, and suggested that additional professors in international fields might be requested. The Minister stated he would see what Mr. Parry could do and would consider this suggestion. He stated that he would have to exercise caution, however, in making any such activity exclusively American. Mr. Newsom indicated that this was thoroughly understood and that any such institute, to be effective, should have professors from several lands.

Mr. Newsom further suggested that USIS would be pleased to try to obtain under the Fulbright program some one to help in the general development of a program of extra-curricular activities in the colleges. The Minister said he felt the best beginning would be with a program of athletics and that he would like to get a man who could do this through Fulbright.

The matter of the Communist influence on students in jails was discussed and Mr. Newsom suggested that the Ministry might wish to start a counter-propaganda movement in the jails. With this in mind, USIS would be willing to train three or four carefully selected people who could instruct the prisoners, through personal interviews, conferences and lectures in the jails. Mr. Newsom pointed out that, if even a small percentage of the prisoners could be shown the error of their thinking, they would be an excellent anti-Communist force once they were released.

Finally, the Minister indicated his interest in receiving any material from USIS which could be used in his program. This, Mr. Newsom promised to provide.

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