

Fulbright letter  
LOBBY File

Suite 600  
815 Connecticut Avenue  
Washington, D.C. 20006

September 22, 1981

Dear Mr. President:

As a former member of the Senate and presently an interested and sympathetic observer of your views about the security of our country, I would like to bring to your attention a relatively small but, I believe, significant activity -- the educational exchange program of the I.C.A. I have discussed this program with your excellent appointees Mr. Charles Wick and Dr. Richard Bishirjian, who I am sure will administer the program efficiently.

My reason for believing that this program is worthy of your attention, is my conviction that it has a direct relation to the security of our country, a matter which is of deep concern to you and to all Americans.

Nominally the educational exchange is an academic matter, but in reality it also affects the basic ingredient of our political relations with other countries, through the individuals who determine governmental decisions directly and indirectly.

The record of more than 30 years of experience reveals that in the major participating countries, many of the important and influential officials, journalists,

The President  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

artists and teachers have lived and studied in the United States. Their knowledge and understanding of our society facilitates the conduct of our foreign policy. During the past 30 years, I have personally heard many of our Ambassadors say that their effectiveness in dealing with foreign officials is enhanced when those officials have lived and studied in the U.S. It is reasonable to assume that the policy of a country toward the U.S. is likely to be more consistent with our national interest if it is based upon an accurate knowledge of our strength and purpose than if it is influenced by illusions and misinformation. Today I do not think it is coincidental that two countries with the largest and most efficient exchange programs with us, Japan and Germany, are two countries with whom we maintain good relations in spite of the fact that they were our two principal enemies in World War II.

Beyond the importance of the personal views of foreign political leaders to our security, the attitude of the people generally will in time influence the decisions of their leaders. It is in this respect, that the influence of the teachers who have studied in the U.S. will affect the people's attitudes and their government's policy.

It is my hope, Mr. President, that you will consider this aspect of our exchange program as related to our national security when reviewing and evaluating the various elements of our defense budget. It may well be that the cost of one airplane added to the modest exchange program, could be a more effective investment in security than the plane.

May I, Mr. President, impose a little further on your attention with some more general observations.

After World War II, it became clear the prospects for peace depended very much on the United States understanding its role as the leader of the free world and the peoples of the world understanding clearly what our leadership could provide. To balance our military might, it became our responsibility not only to export

American ideas and values to foreign people, but also for us to become familiar with and to understand theirs.

To this end, I was privileged to be part of our government's recognition and support of international educational exchange through the program now part of I.C.A. History records few more enlightened national initiatives, I believe, than the balance we sought to provide to our military strength immediately after World War II through programs of material and educational assistance to our allies, our former enemies, as well as the newly independent nations of Africa and Asia. It is not an exaggeration to say that much of our present expertise in foreign affairs derives from the government exchange programs and that the program has served also as a catalyst over the years in attracting thousands of young students and scholars to our colleges and universities.

Some 80 percent of the foreign students who come to the U.S. now do so with their own or their countries' funds. Extraordinary voluntary support of corporations, foundations, and community hospitality groups supplement this process. This growing private sector support does not mean the federal government's role is unnecessary or incidental. Indeed, the evidence is clear that the modestly supported Fulbright and other official U.S. programs serve as the principal catalyst for privately sponsored exchanges, encourage more than 20 other governments such as Japan and Germany to share increasingly the cost of exchanges and establish essential standards for the conduct of exchanges. The most important function of the government program is to insure that those countries strategically critical to our political influence in the world are included.

As you know, the special appropriations for exchanges over the past decade and a half have failed to keep up with inflation so that today the programs have shrunk in constant dollar terms -- and in participant grantees -- to about one half of what they were in the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations.

Page 4  
September 22, 1981

It is a source of increasing concern to Americans who watch carefully the struggle for influence around the world that the Soviet Union is seen to be spending annually four times more than we do for these activities. Even with the generous contributions of the U.S. private and university sector -- which is activated in large measure by U.S. Government-organized efforts -- the official American exchange effort in many of the most critical areas of the world, the Middle East and Latin America for example, is only one third to one tenth that of other nations.

Mr President, I commend to you and your staff the attached statement ENHANCING AMERICAN INFLUENCE ABROAD: INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGES IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST. It represents the collective thinking of sixteen organizations with long experience in international exchange programs, and persuasively suggests a modest program to assure that the U.S. will not continue to decline in this activity.

If you have any questions about the program, I shall, of course, be honored to discuss it further with you at your convenience.

With all best wishes.

Sincerely,

J. W. Fulbright