

“Turning up in Tehran”: Differential Acceleration and the U.S. International Empire

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It is May 21, 1962. In the Near Eastern Studies Department at Princeton University, Professor of Iranian Studies T. Cuyler Young is “turning over in [his] mind” the possibility that he might “come out to Tehran” in early June for meetings about the role U.S. academics might play in the celebration (eventually postponed) of the 2,500-year anniversary of Iran’s monarchy and in order to “get caught up to date” on political developments. On May 29, he is still undecided, but writes in a letter to an Iranian friend in Tehran that he will “be turning up in Tehran on June 10 if my present plans go through.” He has been asked to attend “a committee meeting at Unesco (*sic*) in Paris on June 7 and 8” and also has “university business at Rome, and having got that far, it is too much of a temptation not to go on to Tehran. ... I want to get caught up on things ... [and] naturally want to get as wide a sampling of opinion as possible within a short time.” In the final instance, he succumbs to the temptation and books his ticket a week before his departure. He returns stateside two weeks later, on June 25.¹

This trip was unexceptional. From the early 1960s, Young started visiting Iran for quicker spells and taking trips on shorter notice than before. In the summer of 1961 he spent a couple of weeks with his wife, Helen, in Tehran and various provinces, which they knew from their time as Presbyterian missionaries in the northern Iranian town of Rasht between 1927 and 1936. After a quick trip to Afghanistan, they flew eastwards across the Pacific “almost directly back to the United States, except for three days in Hongkong.” And in November 1964 Young flew from New York to Tehran for two weeks, stopping over in London and Istanbul for short business meetings.²

Simultaneously, as the head of his department at

Princeton University, Young increased his invitations to Middle Eastern scholars and policymakers. Their visits formed part of an expansion, under his chairmanship, of the department’s involvement with Washington. He himself was contributing to Iran policy, and had served at the Office of Strategic Services in World War II and as the first U.S. public affairs officer in Tehran, from 1944 to 1946.³ The foreigners he invited came for “short visit[s],” as he told the Princeton-trained Khodadad Farmanfarmaian, who had been an official with the Iran Plan Organization. Some stayed for a semester; many for shorter periods. He organized their travel accordingly. On May 31, 1962, he informed a professor of Islamic Studies in Cairo, Mustafa Ziade, that he had received a visiting professorship for the fall. Young expected his acceptance note to arrive in Princeton a mere two weeks later, by June 15; and he assured Ziade that Princeton would cover his “round-trip air passage (tourist-economy) between Cairo and New York.” In late January 1964, days before Tehran University’s Muhammad Mo’in was to board a plane to New York to take up a one-semester visiting professorship in Princeton, Young wrote him to recommend he take a helicopter from Kennedy International Airport to Newark Airport, where Young would pick him up by car.⁴

Young’s pace showed in his language, in the self-confident matter-of-factness with which he talked about crossing oceans and continents, “coming out to” and “turning up in” Tehran, “get caught up to date” on the go. The contrast between his language and that of Farzaneh ‘Elmi, who was from the northeastern Iranian city of Mashad and had written to him to offer her assistance while he was in Iran, is striking. “I know that you are surprised to receive this letter,” she wrote, in Persian, “and I guess you will be all the more surprised finding out that somebody is writing you a letter *az farsangha rah*.” Translatable as “from very far away,” this phrase literally means “from the road of (many) *farsangs*,” a measure of distance that, while officially replaced by the kilometer early on in the Pahlavi period (1925–1979), remained in use informally.⁵

With his Middle Eastern airline connections and his list of far-flung acquaintances, Young illustrates what one may call “differential acceleration.” Consider, first, acceleration. While German airlines had intermittently flown from Tehran to Europe before World War II (Junkers Airlines, partnering with the Soviet Ukrovdokhput in 1927–1932, via Baku and Moscow; Deutsche Luft Hansa, via Baghdad, Damascus, Rhodes, Athens, and Vienna to Frankfurt in 1938–1939), Iran’s air linkage to other countries really took off after the war. Now, however, U.S. actors became involved.

Iranian Airways, which, beginning in 1947, flew from Tehran to Paris via Beirut and Athens,



Pan Am service map, 1958⁷



The opening of 'Elmi's typewritten letter

entertained from its establishment in 1944 until 1949 a technical assistance agreement with the American TWA, which owned ten percent of its shares. The other leading U.S. airline company, Pan Am, began serving Tehran in 1955, first as a side branch of its round-the-world route, connecting at Beirut, and then, from 1956 on, as an integral part of that route. Inaugurated in 1947, the round-

the-world route was, beginning in 1958, served by the first U.S. civilian jet, the brand-new Boeing B-707 (see image 1). Lufthansa, which in 1959 launched the first non-stop flight from Tehran to a European city, Munich, took to the air in the postwar era when in 1955 Washington, with London and Paris, gave the green light. And Iran Air, established in 1962, flew Boeing jets.⁶

The U.S. interest in Iran's air sector and the relation between that interest and Iran's accelerated connectivity with the outside world formed part of a larger development. As Jenifer Van Vleck has argued, following World War II, air travel, with its accompanying technical and legal agreements, helped to infrastructurally underpin and discursively project U.S. "nationalist globalism," to use John Fousek's term: the idea that the United States was essential to the globe, the guarantor of an expanding liberal capitalist world in the Cold War. Pan Am and TWA entertained close ties to the U.S. government and were among the world's biggest airlines route-wise; in 1950 they officially changed their names, TWA from Transcontinental & Western Air to Trans World Airlines, and Pan Am from Pan American Airways to Pan American World Airways, which had been its unofficial name since 1943.⁸

More pointedly, one can think of Pan Am's, TWA's, and Boeing's presence in Iran as part of what Paul A. Kramer has called the "international" U.S. empire: one that does not seek to replace nation-states but, rather, works through them.⁹ The United States's worldwide imperial posture created and maintained power inequalities. But simultaneously, some citizens and governments of those (sometimes nominally, sometimes substantially) sovereign nation-states could affect and/or try to benefit from U.S. imperial structures.

It is this combination that the adjective "differential" in the title of this text addresses. It builds on the argument of scholars like Frederick Cooper and Jane Burbank that empires operate by creating differences.¹⁰ But it is not identical with that argument. The political relationship between the postwar U.S. imperial metropolis and its allies, clients, and dependencies, however different in nature, unfolded within, and indeed helped structure, a world of nation-states rather than of colonies.

Consider time—or timing, to be precise. Pan Am integrated Tehran into its round-the-world services route shortly after the United States helped engineer a coup d'état against Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq in 1953 and Iran became an American client state. Indeed, it is clear that different destinations became part of Pan Am's network at different times. As Pan Am coordinated its business with Washington, Washington influenced these different points in time. Pan Am's actions reflected evolving U.S. political

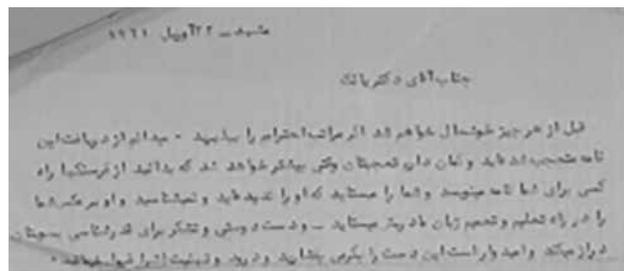
interests as much as commercial benefits. But they also implied the agreement of local powerholders, in this case the Iranian government.

Next, consider space. Although Iran principally looked westwards, it had some air connections eastwards and northwards, too, to the Soviet Union. Also, its principal prewar westward connection, to Germany, remained critical after World War II, although it now, it is true, was under the aegis of the United States. And while the trans-Atlantic route—to Washington's closest allies, in Western Europe, especially Britain—enjoyed the highest number of intercontinental jet flights, Pan Am used the B-707 jet on its round-the-world route beginning in 1958, which was this airplane's inaugural year.

Finally, think of actors. Domestically, Iran's ballooning educated urban middle class, which helped trigger a "politics of promise" after the 1953 coup, was much better positioned to enjoy the benefits of accelerated air connectivity than its poorer co-citizens, especially in rural areas.¹¹ It was not by chance that 'Elmi lived in a large city, Mashhad, was working at her university's literature department, and used a Persian typewriter and an aerogram to contact Young (see images 2 and 3).

The concept of differential acceleration helps us analyze the relationship between Iranian and American actors, too. Young's swifter access to Iran beginning around 1960 and his self-assured tone—"come out to" Tehran—reflected an imperial metropolis's hub-and-spokes view of the world. What is more, expressions such as "get caught up to date," quite literally on the fly, corroborate Van Vleck's point that the U.S. "Empire of the Air" often beheld other countries from far away and from high up, as it were. Whereas Young and his wife had spent nine years almost uninterruptedly in interwar Iran, by the early 1960s his stays had shrunk to a couple of weeks. Then again, airplanes in general, and jets in particular, enabled him to be quasi-simultaneously in two places, through visits and by getting air editions of Iranian newspapers.¹² He was able to gather information and nurture contacts in Iran regularly while processing and using that information politically and remaining present at home. This ability differentiated him, a professor at a rich, well-connected Ivy League university, from any academic or political Iranian counterpart.

But the middle-class Iranians in our vignette are not like Valeska Huber's nomads, whose movement between the Sinai and Egypt was slowed by the world-transport-accelerating Suez Canal.¹³ Iranians participated in Iran's U.S.-led air transport acceleration. Such participation could be direct. More interestingly, it sometimes took the form of bandwagoning. 'Elmi was a case in point: she sought to benefit from Young's high-speed movement between Iran and the United States. Another example was Fakhri Garakani, a resident of Tehran. She knew Young from her birthplace, the north Iranian city of Rasht, so in March 1962 she had an American Presbyterian missionary there ask him to make an inquiry in Washington about an intricately embroidered portrait of Pope John XXIII that she had sent to John F. Kennedy, the whereabouts of which were unknown. Young agreed to help. What answer he obtained



'Elmi's aerogram to Young

from the White House, and why Garakani sent a gift across the Atlantic to a U.S. president in the first place, is a story I tell elsewhere.¹⁴

Notes:

1. T. Cuyler Young to Theodore Wertime [U.S. Information Services, Tehran], May 21, 1962, folder 25, box 11, AC164, Seeley Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University (hereafter SMML/PU); and Young to Hussein Mahdavy, May 29, 1962, folder 2, box 4, AC164, SMML/PU. See also Young to Pryor, June 1, 1962, folder 3, box 4, AC164, SMML/PU.
2. Young to Morteza Madany, October 30, 1961, folder 10, box 3, AC164, SMML/PU. See also Young to Mahdavi, July 23, 1964, folder 6, box 6, AC164, SMML/PU; and "Young, Theodore C.," RG360, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia.
3. Claudia Castiglioni, *Gli Stati Uniti e la modernizzazione iraniana* (Milan, 2015), 46–47, 52–54, 259; Matthew K. Shannon, "Reading Iran: American Academics and the Last Shah," *Iranian Studies* 51:2 (2018): 289–316; Cuyler T. Young, "Iran in Continuing Crisis," *Foreign Affairs* 40:2 (1962): 275–92.
4. Young to Khodadad Farmanfarmanian, September 17, 1962, folder 6, box 4, AC164, SMML/PU; and Young to Mustafa Ziade, May 31, 1962, folder 2, box 4, AC164, SMML/PU. See also Young to Mo'in, January 27, 1964, folder 1, box 6, AC164, SMML/PU.
5. 'Elmi to Young, April 22, 1961, folder F, box 8, AC164, SMML/PU.
6. See <http://www.timetableimages.com/ttimages/dlh.htm> (timetables issued October 2, 1938, and January 15, 1940, dropping Tehran); *Deutsche Luft Hansa timetables* (April 1928), 102 (I thank Björn Larsson for this item). See also http://www.iranchamber.com/history/articles/history_iranian_air_transportation_industry.php;

7. <http://merrick.library.miami.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/asm0341/id/3425/rec/1>; <http://www.timetableimages.com/ttimages/pa/pa56/pa56-03.jpg>; and <http://www.timetableimages.com/ttimages/lh/lh5905/lh5905-2.jpg>. The British Comet 4 jet was launched in 1958, too; first was the Soviet Tupolev 104, in 1956.
8. John Fousek, *To Lead the Free World: American Nationalism and the Cultural Roots of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000), 7; Jenifer Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air: Aviation and the American Ascendancy* (Cambridge, MA, 2013).
9. Paul Kramer, "Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World," *American Historical Review* 116:5 (2011): 1366.
10. Frederick Cooper and Jane Burbank, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ, 2011).
11. Cyrus Schayegh, "Iran's Karaj Dam Affair: Emerging Mass Consumerism, the Politics of Promise, and the Cold War in the Early Post-war Third World," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54:3 (2012): 612–43.
12. For Young's reliance on air editions to stay up to date, see Young to Mahdavy, January 26, 1962, folder 14, box 13, AC164, SMML/PU.
13. Valeska Huber, *Channelling Mobilities: Migration and Globalisation in the Suez Canal Region and Beyond, 1869-1914* (Cambridge, UK, 2013).
14. Cyrus Schayegh, "Foreign Gifts and U.S. Imperial Ambiguities: the Kennedy Years," in *Globalizing the U.S. Presidency: Postcolonial Views of John F. Kennedy*, ed. Cyrus Schayegh (London, forthcoming).

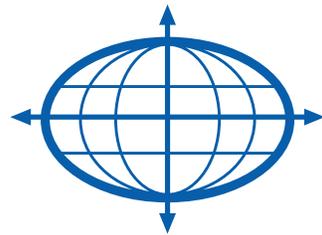
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Every other year, SHAFR holds its annual meeting in a location other than the Washington, D.C. area. The SHAFR Council would like to hear from members interested in hosting the conference in their home cities in late June 2022 and is especially interested in hearing proposals from cities beyond the continental United States. Council is also interested in hearing from potential hosts for 2024 and 2026.

Specifics about what hosting the annual meeting entails can be found on the SHAFR website: <https://shafir.org/conferences/site-selection/CFP-2022>. In an effort to provide as much lead time as possible for negotiating with hotels and other facilities, **the deadline for submission of applications will be 1 December 2019**, which will allow Council to consider them at its January 2020 meeting.

Questions and draft proposals can be sent to SHAFR Executive Director Amy Sayward at Amy.Sayward@shafir.org. Complete proposals should address also the main questions listed on the CFP website: <https://shafir.org/conferences/site-selection/CFP-2022>

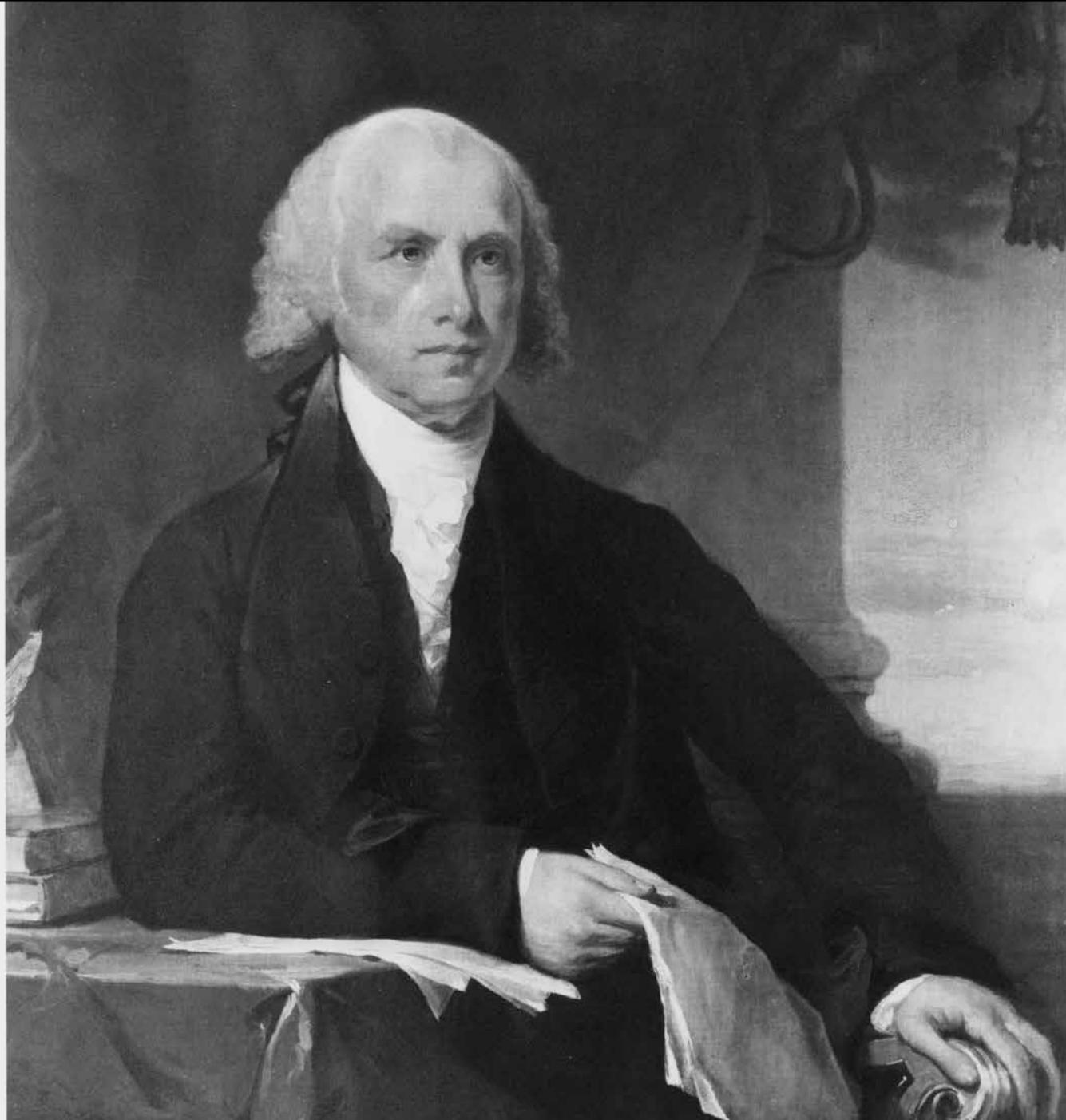
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