

SUMMARY RECORD OF A CONVERSATION  
REGARDING THE FOREIGN RELATIONS SERIES  
HELD AT THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
JULY 23, 1990

Participants:

Prof. Betty Glad, University of South Carolina  
Prof. Bradford Perkins, University of Michigan  
Ms. Anne Van Camp, Archivist at the Hoover Institution,  
Stanford University  
Prof. Stephen Zamora, University of Houston Law Center  
Senior Deputy Assistant Secretary of State  
for Public Affairs V. Kim Hoggard  
Deputy Assistant Secretary of State  
for Legislative Affairs Richard Mueller  
Deputy Assistant Secretary of State  
for Public Affairs George Kennedy  
The Historian of the Department, William Z. Slany

Also Present:

John P. Glennon, Office of the Historian  
Elaine McDevitt, Office of the Historian

Ms. Hoggard began by expressing her pleasure at being able to discuss with the four members of the Advisory Committee on Historical Diplomatic Documentation the Department's ongoing efforts to assure the comprehensiveness, accuracy, and overall credibility of the Foreign Relations series. The Department takes very seriously the recent expressions of concern about the completeness and usefulness of some recent volumes. These are also issues of concern to the Department and the Bureau of Public Affairs. The Department and its historians have themselves been wrestling with these issues for some years and have been searching for solutions. Ms. Hoggard assured the four members of the Advisory Committee of her confidence in the professionalism of the Historian and his staff and their

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commitment to the publication project. She also stressed the Department's continued need for the advice and recommendations of the Committee in the preparation of the series.

Ms. Hoggard summarized the process being followed by the Department for modernizing and perfecting procedures for the preparation, declassification, verification, and publication of the Foreign Relations volumes. The process involves discussion among all the Department officials and divisions who share the responsibility for the preparation and publication of the volumes. These internal discussions were deliberate and sometimes more time-consuming than the Bureau of Public Affairs would wish. Under Secretary for Management Ivan Selin was taking a very strong personal role in giving overall guidance to the process. The Department was centering its internal deliberations on the basis of a plan developed by the Historian. Once this plan was fully agreed upon within the Department, it would be fully coordinated with other agencies in the foreign affairs community.

The Historian offered a short outline of the four major elements of the plan for the modernized Foreign Relations series that the Department now had under review. First and foremost was the urgent need for Department historians to expand their documentary research to the records of the other principal foreign affairs agencies of government. The agencies would be expected to cooperate with the Department historians by providing access to the historical records. In the case of intelligence agencies such cooperation might consist of agency historians collecting documents for publication in the Foreign Relations series.

The second aspect of the plan was the refinement of the declassification procedures to provide a greater lean toward disclosure of complete historical context. The key to such forward leaning declassification was the development of an appeals procedure that involved policymakers at whatever leadership level was necessary. These officials would apply a balancing test to difficult declassification cases and reach final declassification decisions that assured the most accurate and comprehensive historical record consistent with current American policies and negotiations.

The third part of the plan under study in the Department, and already partly implemented, was the development of features in published volumes that would maximize the readers' understanding of research

methodologies used in preparing volumes, explain the relationship between what was published and what was available in the historical archives, and indicate as precisely as possible what subjects or particular information could not be included in a published volume.

Finally, the plan calls for expanded activity by the Advisory Committee in assessing the scholarship and completeness of the published record and making recommendations to the Department regarding the volumes. Access to the classified documentation withheld from volumes was essential for the Committee to make fully informed recommendations. It was also necessary for the Committee to expand its advice and insight into the planning of the volumes so that the research efforts of Department historians in the archives of the various agencies can be better focused.

Prof. Perkins initiated a brief discussion of the use of disclaimers in Foreign Relations volumes in those instances when the declassification procedure resulted in the withholding of documentation integral to a coherent and comprehensive record. Perkins himself feared that use of disclaimers might encourage a more inflexible declassification process. He posed several examples of sensitive topics for which it would be difficult to write a disclaimer on which historians and declassifiers could agree. Ms. Hoggard indicated that the prefaces to the most recently published volumes showed the Department's intention to try to explain to readers as much as possible about materials not included or withheld because of declassification decisions.

Ms. Hoggard was glad of the opportunity to consult with the four Advisory Committee members, and eager to convene a formal meeting of the full Committee soon. She proposed that the next meeting be moved up from the original November date to sometime in October. There was agreement that an earlier meeting would be extremely useful. The Historian would arrange a date. There would not be sufficient time to provide the Committee members with Top Secret security clearances by the October meeting. The Committee might meet again in early spring of 1991 when the members' clearances were completed, and begin the process of seeing the complete record of denied documents of Foreign Relations volumes.

The Committee members present for the consultation requested information about forthcoming meetings. They

wished to know whether the proposed October meeting would include at least a continuation of the oral briefings regarding the impact of the declassification process upon particular Foreign Relations volumes. Ms. Hoggard indicated that the PA Bureau would try to arrange such oral briefings for the next Committee meeting. She indicated further that the Department had no wish to become involved in an overhaul of the government's entire declassification process. The Department's immediate goals were to improve the quality of the series, and to ensure that the Advisory Committee was able, on the basis of access to withheld classified documents, to verify the volumes or make recommendations regarding their editing and publication.

There was discussion about Top Secret security clearances. These clearances involved certain responsibilities, and Committee members would have to decide whether they wished to assume such responsibilities and potential constraints. Those Committee members present requested information about the impact upon them and their scholarly research and writing of Top Secret security clearances. The Department will look into the issue and provide the Committee members with such information.

Deputy Assistant Secretary Mueller provided an overview of the status of legislation regarding the Foreign Relations series pending in the Congress. Such legislation had been included in S.2749 which was a bill to provide supplemental authorization of appropriations for FY 1991 for the Department of State and the USIA. The bill was approved by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee without any discussion of the sections regarding the Foreign Relations series. There appeared to be little likelihood that the legislation would be acted upon by the time of the Congressional summer recess in early August.

The Department of State and other foreign affairs agencies have closely studied the proposed legislation and found it seriously flawed. The Bureau of Public Affairs understands that the legislation was well intended and had a worthy goal--to strengthen the Foreign Relations series. The PA Bureau feels that the goal could be better met by the Executive branch's adopting a plan for the Foreign Relations series of the sort being considered now within the Department, and subsequently to be coordinated with other agencies.

Deputy Assistant Secretary Mueller and Dr. Slany explained some of principal concerns with the

legislation. The section of the proposed legislation creating an Historical Advisory Committee is particularly flawed. It would require that the chairman of a new Historical Advisory Committee be appointed by the President and receive the consent of the Senate. Some members of the Advisory Committee found this provision particularly objectionable. The new Committee would not be a committee advising the Department and its historians on the scholarship of the series but would instead become an operational body of the government meeting frequently and for extended periods of time in order to review and evaluate declassification decisions of the Department and other agencies. The proposed legislation also fails to provide for the position of Executive Secretary. Regulations assign the position of Executive Secretary of the current Advisory Committee to the Historian who is particularly able to connect the needs and experiences of the Department historians with the recommendations and assistance of the Advisory Committee.

Above all, the proposed legislation would establish standards of withholding that were totally in conflict with the existing structure of laws, regulations, and directives on classification, declassification, and access and use of special types of security information. Several agencies have already begun their own efforts to modify the draft legislation. Steps are also under way to remedy a clause in the legislation that would require agencies to make available to the Department, at considerable cost to themselves, vast numbers of copies of documents for use in preparing the historical record.

Anne Van Camp shared with others at the meeting information about the continuing efforts within Congressional committees to revise and further develop the language of the proposed Foreign Relations legislation. Some of the revisions under consideration, such as the explicit designation of particular major professional societies to offer nominees to the new Committee, might be improvements over the existing language. The scope and nature of the responsibility of the proposed Advisory Committee to review all withheld historical documents appeared to be totally unworkable.

The PA Bureau regarded its draft plan for a modernized Foreign Relations series as far preferable to any Congressional legislation. Of the current proposed legislation, the provisions regarding a new and different Advisory Committee were far more unworkable than the more

general provisions establishing the publication of the Foreign Relations series as a statutory responsibility of the Department and the Executive branch.

There was some discussion by the Advisory Committee members present as to how they might make known their own views regarding the proposed legislation. Ms. Hoggard urged against any collective Advisory Committee action on legislation at this time, observing that individual Committee members like any other citizen must decide for themselves. She did request that the Committee members wait until the Department had prepared and sent to the Congress, a letter setting forth in some detail, the Department and Executive branch position and policy on the question of reforming the preparation of the Foreign Relations series, and on the particular legislation pending in Congress. Advisory Committee members might agree or disagree with aspects of Department policy, but it ought to be more clearly understood before strong judgments were made about the pending legislation.