

## **Report of the Advisory Committee on Historical Diplomatic Documentation, January 1-December 31, 2014**

The Historical Advisory Committee to the Department of State (HAC) has two principal responsibilities. First, it oversees the preparation and timely publication of the *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)* series. Second, it monitors the declassification and release of Department of State records.

The Foreign Relations Statute of 1991 (Public Law 102-138 [105 Stat. 647, codified in relevant part at 22 U.S.C. § 4351 *et seq.*) mandates these responsibilities. It calls for a “thorough, accurate, and reliable” documentary record of United States foreign relations. Since the enactment of this law, HO has worked diligently to compile and publish *FRUS* volumes which meet this standard.

HAC appreciates that meeting this standard has become even more challenging and complex in view of the explosion of vital government documents pertaining to foreign relations produced by a wide spectrum of government departments and agencies during the 1960s and later decades, and in view of the parallel requirement that volumes be published no later than 30 years after the events they document. HO has struggled to meet these twin obligations, and there remains a gap between publication of the *FRUS* volumes and the 30-year target. HAC nonetheless is delighted that HO’s record over the past year builds on the robust progress it made over the preceding two. The projected publication in 2015 of the first volume in the Ronald Reagan administration subseries signals that HO has made significant advances in its focused effort to meet the 30-year target.

The 1991 Foreign Relations statute also mandates that HAC monitor and advise on the declassification and opening of the Department of State’s records. In this area of its responsibility, the HAC remains disappointed and concerned.

Executive Order 13526, issued in December 2009, mandates the declassification of records over 25-years-old—unless valid and compelling reasons can be specified for withholding them. With a few exceptions, State’s Office of Information Programs and Services (IPS) warrants praise for meeting this requirement, although without greater resources doing so in the future is at risk. Despite IPS’s record, however, the time required for reviews by other agencies with equities, for processing, and for transfer, State’s records may not be available to researchers for many years beyond the E.O’s requirement for review. HAC applauds the leadership of both NARA and IPS for more aggressively addressing this problem in 2014. Still, more must be done.

## **Publications of the *Foreign Relations Series***

The slow rate of declassifying records, electronic as well as paper, exacerbates the challenge of meeting the *Foreign Relations of the United States series*' mandated twenty-five year deadline. Still, during 2014 the Office of the Historian published nine volumes. These are:

1. 1969–1976, Volume XXXV, *National Security Policy, 1973–1976*
2. 1977–1980, Volume XXI, *Cyprus; Turkey; Greece*
3. 1969–1976, Volume E–15, Part 2, *Documents on Western Europe, 1973–1976*
4. 1969–1976, Volume XXI, *Chile, 1969–1973*
5. 1969–1976, Volume E–9, Part 1, *Documents on North Africa, 1973–1976*
6. 1977–1980, Volume I, *Foundations of Foreign Policy*
7. 1917–1972, *Public Diplomacy, World War I*
8. 1969–1976, Volume XXXVIII, Part 2, *Organization and Management of Foreign Policy; Public Diplomacy, 1973–1976*
9. 1977–1980, Volume IX, *Arab-Israeli Dispute, August 1978–December 1980*

This total, which includes the long-awaited *Chile, 1969-1973* and the pioneering *Public Diplomacy, World War I*, amounts to two more volumes published than in 2013 and three more than in 2012. With twenty-two additional volumes compiled and submitted for declassification, HO expects to publish at least this many volumes next year. The eagerly anticipated retrospective volume on Iran 1953 is ready for publication and only awaits a State Department decision to approve its release. HO has set its sights on completing the Jimmy Carter administration subseries, will soon begin publishing the Reagan administration subseries, and has begun work on the George H. W. Bush subseries.

The management skills of the Historian, Deputy Historian, General Editor, and others in supervisory positions, coupled with innovative organizational initiatives, have generated efficiencies throughout the production chain. In addition, the maturation and commitment of the exceptional cadre of compilers, and the increase in the number of very capable editors, has dramatically reduced the time required for a volume to progress from conception to publication. The high morale throughout HO and the office's acquisition of a more spacious and secure facility on Navy Hill which will provide on-site access to highly classified information augurs well for HO's future productivity.

HAC commends HO for accelerating the publication cycle. It likewise commends

the office for its advances in digitizing the *FRUS* volumes. In early 2015 HO will release twenty newly digitized versions of volumes that cover 1948 to 1951 and were published in print between 1973 and 1998. These digitized versions will be available as fully-searchable e-books on the office's website and in a format readable on tablets and smart phones. In the near future HO intends to complete this initiative so that all *FRUS* volumes will be digitized. HO concurrently has improved its outreach to the public through the effective use of social media and by hosting on its website such valuable resources as a series of essays, "Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations" and an index to the diplomatic archives available around the world.

### **The Challenge of the 30-Year Requirement**

HAC congratulates HO for its impressive progress in moving toward the 30-year target for publishing a *FRUS* volume. It recognizes, nevertheless, that notwithstanding the occasional exception, meeting this target will in most cases remain out of reach. In 1985, with the gap between a document's origin and its publication in *FRUS* growing continually longer, Ronald Reagan established the 30-year requirement. Yet since then, the series has never averaged a 30-year lag time, and the current average exceeds 35 years. HO designed a plan that is enabling it to *compile and review* the volumes in the Reagan administration subseries within the 30-year time frame. The progress it has made in executing that plan, combined with the start it has made conducting the research for the George H.W. Bush administration subseries, should facilitate the timely publication of the Bush and subsequent administrations' subseries. HAC judges nonetheless that despite HO's best efforts, it will not be able to *publish* the majority of these subseries' volumes within 30-years of the events that they cover.

This judgment reflects the HAC's understanding of the challenges HO confronts, specifically those that are not within its control. Ironically, the most severe challenge stems from the 1991 legislation itself. That statute mandated and facilitated research beyond the State Department and White House: in the files of the Central Intelligence Agency, the Departments of Defense and Energy, and all other Executive Office agencies involved in the conduct of U.S. foreign relations, and the incorporation of the resultant documentation in the *FRUS* volumes. Not only must these agencies declassify their documents for inclusion in the series, but all departments, notably the CIA and the Departments of Defense and Energy, must review documents of any origin that include their "equities." Exacerbating the delays, the Kyl-Lott amendment to the 1999 Defense Appropriations Act requires a secondary review by the Department of Energy of every document, irrespective of its originating agency, believed to contain nuclear-related information. This

tortuous process of declassification is very likely to thwart HO's outstanding efforts to meet the 30-year requirement for publishing many FRUS volumes.

In an effort to facilitate access and review, the State Department signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the CIA, and in the late 1990s, it established a State-CIA-NSC committee, the "High-Level Panel" (HLP), to provide guidelines for declassifying and publishing documentation relating to covert actions and other sensitive intelligence activities that had a major impact on U.S. foreign policy and to adjudicate disputes. The results of these initiatives have been outstanding. In 2014 the CIA reviewed more than 3500 documents submitted by HO for declassification, and the office and agency collaborated to verify and declassify 9 volumes in manuscript. Also during 2014 the HLP process yielded approval for five cases, with another five under deliberation. The expectation is a decision will be reached on these by the spring of 2015.

Despite organizational improvements and better cooperation, this commitment to transparency extends the time between compilation and publication, often by multiple years. And the number of covert actions and other intelligence-related issues that will require HLP resolution will rise dramatically as HO compilers work through the Reagan years and beyond. HO estimates that the number of volumes in the Reagan administration subseries with HLP issues is likely to be double the number in the Carter administration subseries.

### **Declassification Issues and the Transfer and Processing of Department of State Records**

In its past two Annual Reports, the HAC expressed grave concern over the inability of NARA to process and transfer electronic and paper records in order to make them accessible to scholars and the public in a timely manner. The committee appreciates the challenges generated by underfunding, understaffing, the increased volume of documents, and the rising number of electronic documents. Electronic cables and emails pose particularly nettlesome challenges, exacerbating the bottlenecks in the review, declassification, and transfer process that have built up over the years.

HO is heartened that its concerns have resonated with NARA's leadership. Indeed, in addition to strengthening its longstanding engagement with IPS, the committee has had more opportunities to meet with NARA's leadership to monitor the rate at which are processed and made available for public research. Signaling NARA's commitment to working more closely with HAC, William Mayer, NARA's

Executive for Research Services, now regularly attends meetings to address questions that HAC poses.

HAC appreciates the willingness of Mr. Mayer and his colleagues to provide more information about and insight into the problems NARA confronts. It likewise applauds NARA's commitment to improving the recently launched online "National Archives Catalog," the new hires that it has made despite severely constrained resources, and the efforts of the National Declassification Center to coordinate agency reviews of classified records held by NARA. It also notes with pleasure that, despite resource constraints, the efficiencies that IPS has introduced into its review processes have accelerated the pace while maintaining the quality. It warrants repeating that IPS is meeting the 25-year review requirement. Yet secondary reviews of these records by other agencies with equities and additional obstacles cause delays in these records reaching the researcher.

Still, the juxtaposition of this progress and the millions and millions of twenty-five or more year-old records that still must undergo review or quality review before they are declassified, only after which can they undergo final archival processing, described in what are now cursory finding aids, and finally made available to researchers, attests to the magnitude of the problems. A greater reliance on technologies is essential, but those thus far available are insufficient to dramatically accelerate the review, transfer, and release process, particularly when confronted with the need to filter out classified along with personally identifiable information (PII). Current classification guidelines and priorities severely intensify the challenge. In 2014 the government spent \$11.63 billion, only \$100 million of which was spent on declassification.

Concurrently NARA must remedy an acute shortage of space. Notwithstanding improvements in its use of its facilities across the United States, it lacks the capacity to house all the paper records for which it is responsible. And it cannot afford the cost of maintaining the infrastructure necessary to store the explosion of electronic records. As is the case with declassification and processing, without an infusion of funding NARA cannot fulfill its mission.

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