
1971 Report of the Advisory Committee on "Foreign Relations of the United States"

The Advisory Committee on Foreign Relations of the United States, consisting of representatives from the American Political Science Association, the American Historical Association, and the American Society of International Law met in Washington at the Department of State on November 5, 1971. A report on its meeting printed below, was prepared and submitted to the Secretary of State, William P. Rogers, by a Committee composed of Inis L. Claude, Jr., Chairman, Richard C. Snyder* and Elmer Plischke,* American Political Science Association; David R. Deener and Alwyn V. Freeman, American Society of International Law; and Walter LaFeber, Ernest R. May** and Paul A. Varg, American Historical Association.

Report of the Meeting of the Advisory Committee on "Foreign Relations of the United States"

The regular publication of successive volumes of the documentary series, "Foreign Relations of the United States," by a professionally expert and dedicated staff within the Historical Office of the Department of State is a distinctive enterprise in which the Government and the people of the United States deserve to take great pride. This series not only serves the professional interests of scholars, but, by conducing to more general knowledge and more accurate understanding of American foreign policy, it serves the public interest in the broadest sense.

This national asset has been deteriorating in recent years — not in the quality, but in the timeliness, of the product. The Advisory Committee has repeatedly deplored the tendency to allow the series to fall farther and farther behind and urged the Department to take the relatively modest measures that would have checked and reversed that tendency. The results have been discouraging; the time lag between events and the publication of volumes covering those events has now been stretched to approximately 25 years, despite the officially proclaimed policy of holding it at 20 years. It is our conviction that this slippage reflects the assignment of an unduly low priority to the *Foreign Relations* program. The value and importance of

* Mr. Plischke, a retiring member of the Advisory Committee, participated in the 1971 meeting in lieu of Mr. Snyder, who was unable to attend. Mr. Snyder nonetheless joins in this report.

** Mr. May could not attend the 1971 meeting, but joins in this report.

the enterprise have not been adequately appreciated at the higher levels of government.

The consultations and deliberations of the Advisory Committee at its meeting in November, 1971, revealed substantial reasons for hope that this situation is changing. In large measure, we suspect, because of the controversy engendered by the unauthorized release of "The Pentagon Papers," there is now a lively interest in the declassification and publication of documents relating to foreign affairs to be found throughout the government and in various sectors of the American public. Newspapers that have not been known to give editorial support to the recurrent recommendations of the Advisory Committee have become champions of the people's right to read foreign relations documents. A high-level Council on Classification Policy has been created within the Department of State. By special administrative decision, the Department opened most of its files covering the wartime years, 1942-45, in January, 1972, substantially before the normal date for making these records available. The President has asked for exploration of the questions of declassifying, and possibly of publishing ahead of normal schedule, documents pertaining to major international crises of the postwar period. Finally, the President ordered on March 8, 1972, that the *Foreign Relations* series be brought within three years to the twenty-year standard, and directed the heads of relevant agencies to give full cooperation in reaching and maintaining that standard.

These initiatives point to the increasing acknowledgement of the importance of the work of the Department's Historical Office. The staff responsible for the *Foreign Relations* series is in fact the key component of the State Department's declassification system. In selecting and compiling documents for publication, it initiates consideration of declassification. In publishing the series, it gives declassification meaning by making cleared documents readily available to scholars, the press, and the public at large. If the current sense of urgency concerning this matter is to be translated into a scheme for the orderly, systematic, and responsible release of papers, this clearly must involve the strengthening of the capabilities of the *Foreign Relations* staff.

The Advisory Committee supports the President's insistence upon a crash program to reduce the interval between events and publication to twenty years, and therefore urges that the Historical Office be authorized without delay to

recruit highly qualified professionals in adequate numbers to achieve that objective.

Aside from the long-standing personnel shortage, the most serious barrier to the accelerated production of *Foreign Relations* volumes is the increasingly cumbersome and time-consuming matter of securing clearance for documents selected for inclusion. This problem grows as the staff moves farther into the postwar years and encounters larger numbers of papers that require clearance by executive agencies other than the Department of State, and by foreign governments. Within the Department, and in relation to other agencies, the Historical Office frequently finds itself engaged in something like an adversary procedure, advocating prompt and affirmative decisions on clearance and encountering delay or resistance. The Historical Office requires and deserves assistance in this matter. *We urge the Secretary of State to require that declassification of documents for inclusion in Foreign Relations volumes be handled at the level of the Country Directors, to support the Historical Office in its insistence that galleys be reviewed without undue delay, and to provide effective means for resolution of disagreements within the Department concerning the propriety of declassifying particular papers. We further recommend that the Secretary intervene on behalf of the Historical Office whenever negotiations are required with agencies outside the Department to facilitate prompt and reasonable decisions on clearance questions. Moreover, we urge that the Council on Classification Policy support the Foreign Relations publication program by acting vigorously to expedite the clearance process.*

We note with approval that the recent opening of the documentary files through 1945 has the temporary effect of extending the "open period" several years beyond the standard 30-years-before-current-date terminal point and of eliminating the "restricted period." *The Advisory Committee believes that both aspects of this exceptional situation should be perpetuated, and we recommend that the Department adopt a new regulation, providing that the records for a given year (other than those in particularly sensitive categories requiring special treatment) be opened when the Foreign Relations volumes for that year are published or when twenty-five years have elapsed, whichever occurs first. This would establish 25 years as the maximum, and 20 years as the optimum, duration of the closed period. The proposed regulation, like the one it is intended to replace, will doubtless engender some difficulties*

and dissatisfactions, but we believe that the advantages of making foreign policy materials subject to open access five to ten years earlier, without re-introducing the cumbersome provision for a "restricted period," would outweigh any disadvantages that could reasonably be expected.

The Advisory Committee reacts favorably to the possibility, suggested by a spokesman for the President on August 12, 1971, that the appropriate section of the Historical Office might undertake to compile and publish collections of documents relating to major international crises substantially before those events would be covered by *Foreign Relations* volumes published in normal course, and recommends that such a program be carried out. This would have the advantage of making particularly important documents generally available in timely fashion, facilitating scholarly research and nourishing public discussion concerning issues closely relevant to current foreign policy problems. While we are aware that the advancing age of a document lessens the difficulty of releasing it, it is also true that the same factor lessens the importance of releasing it; the older the document, the more its value for the democratic process tends to diminish. It might be added that the preparation of "crisis volumes" should provide valuable groundwork for the editing of the regular *Foreign Relations* volumes that will in due course provide more comprehensive coverage of the same episodes, thereby contributing to the maintenance of the *Foreign Relations* schedule. If it should prove impossible to revive the *Current Documents* series, the "crisis volumes" would also compensate in some measure for that loss to research and public education. *We nevertheless urge that, in any case, vigorous efforts be made to provide for the resumption of the Current Documents publications.*

Finally, the Advisory Committee recommends that authorization and funds be provided for it to meet with representatives of the Historical Office twice each year, adding a spring meeting to its traditional autumn session. This proposal is motivated by the sense that a single annual meeting does not offer adequate opportunity to follow up recommendations put forward in the annual report, since the primary business of that meeting is the formulation of a new report. If an additional meeting is arranged, it is our intention that the annual report of the Advisory Committee will continue to emanate from the fall meeting, and that the spring meeting will be devoted exclusively to inquiry into and discussion of the reactions engendered and the results generated by the report of the previous fall.