

The Profession

REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON "FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES" ON ITS MEETING OF NOVEMBER 9, 1973

A. The Declassification Obstacle

I

In its 1972 report, the Advisory Committee was pleased to note that during that year the publication of the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series had reached the record level of 11 volumes — the highest since 1861. To the Committee it then seemed as though the Department of State was, at last, well on the road to reducing the publication time gap from 25 years to the 20 year period targeted in the President's memorandum of March 8, 1972 to the Secretary of State. Unhappily, this forward progress was not maintained in 1973; and unless forthright action is taken to cure the chronic ailment which impairs the optimum capability of the Department's Historical Office, the prospects for reducing this time lag are not bright. None of this is the fault of that office, which, as in previous years, has been discharging its functions with commendable efficiency. Nor can the fault be attributed to inadequate staff and funding of the *Foreign Relations* series. The major road-block, as before, resides in other interested agencies of the Government whose cooperation in the declassification process has not always been as energetic or as enthusiastic as it should be. Entombed documents, as our 1972 report complained, are of no use to scholars or to the public in general; yet in the Committee's view these other agencies appear to have been dragging their feet to a point where sometimes declassification looks like a cover for indecision and inaction.

The manner in which the Department is held up in its schedule is evidenced by the fact that after galley proofs have been circulated to the other agencies, a year or more has been required to clear a particular paper through the Department of Defense, the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Council. At the rate that clearances are now being received, not only will the time lag not be overcome, but it is likely that the series will fall progressively further behind. It is, of course, to be expected that some years will present greater difficulties than others; thus, although the 1949 volumes are well along, those for 1948 have been held up by the clearance process. This means in turn that the 1948 records in the National Archives cannot be opened to scholars until all 1948 volumes are published. In view of the importance of this material, the Committee voices the hope that prompt clearance for the 1948 volumes will soon be obtained. Never has accessibility to the lessons of the recent, pro-

logue years been more essential to the people of this nation; but the dissemination of this material is impeded despite executive determination at the highest level that the time lag in publishing the documentation should be reduced to 20 years by 1976.

II

Responsibility for accelerating publication of the *Foreign Relations* series has been placed upon the Department of State; but it cannot discharge this responsibility without the multi-lateral effort of the Department of Defense, the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Council. Some of these agencies have simply failed to press on with declassification to the extent demanded in the President's memorandum of March 8, 1972. That memorandum directed the agencies mentioned to cooperate fully with the Secretary of State in collecting and declassifying materials. The directive has not resolved the difficulty, which has, on the contrary, been growing more acute. Because this condition was foreseen by the Committee last year, it suggested in its 1972 report that, on those occasions when cooperation failed to solve matters of declassification, *the Secretary of State be empowered to frame specific recommendations and that his recommendations be given substantial weight in the resolution of the issue.* The Committee desires to reaffirm that suggestion and to urge that the Secretary of State find it appropriate to frame and support appropriate recommendations which will assist in overcoming this pervasive and wearisome obstacle of declassification. Good faith compliance by all agencies with the spirit of the President's instruction should go far towards overcoming the inherent agency reluctance which has been hamstringing the process. If this fails to dispose of the problem it may become necessary for the Department to consider whether the time has not come to recommend to the President that declassification authority be removed from the other agencies and vested either in the Department of State or possibly in a central clearance office under its over-all direction, and composed of representatives of the agencies in question whose direct mandate would be to expedite the declassification process. But whatever the means adopted, work in the *Foreign Relations* series must go forward as rapidly as possible.

B. Other Problem Areas

I

The *Foreign Relations* volumes represent only a

small portion of the documentation in archives within and outside the Washington headquarters. Although the volumes serve as an invaluable but highly selective lead to extensive source materials from which they are culled (to reproduce all of these overwhelming papers would be a practical impossibility) there is a mass of other valuable, classified material which remains largely inaccessible in the archives of the United States Mission to the United Nations, in the files of the numerous Embassy posts of the United States as well as in the archives of various regional organizations and special diplomatic missions to NATO, GATT and the like, in Brussels, Geneva and elsewhere. There is a veritable mine of untapped information on such questions as Chinese representation in the United Nations, the controversy over selection of a new Secretary-General of the United Nations, issues dealt with in private sessions of the Security Council, United States policy on GATT and even the old Lend-Lease program which should be brought within the grasp of scholars as quickly as declassification permits. On the other hand, the Committee is not impervious to the complexity of the clearance problem with respect to the documentation of such organizations as NATO where clearance by all member governments is required for release.

What is important is that all such material which is reachable should be made available to the Historical Office of the Department of State and included within the *Foreign Relations* series, so that when it is announced that the material of a given year, say, 1947, is "opened up", that means *all* the material, and not all material except that of a particular regional mission or foreign service post. Exclusion of the latter could, among other things, distort the historical appraisal of an issue, a period, a policy. *The Committee therefore strongly recommends that all these archives be brought into the Foreign Relations research work of the Historical Office, so that they can be included within the series and opened up on the same basis as the Department's own files.*

II

Even prior to the publication of declassified material, it often happens that scholars — at whose insistence, incidentally, the declassification of particular documents may have been undertaken — have need for copies of such materials. The sheer mass of material which has been proliferating in geometric proportion with each passing year can of itself stifle effective access unless modern technology is utilized to permit ready retrieval. In its 1972 report, the Advisory Committee recommended that consideration be given to the development of systems whereby diplomatic documents located in the Washington area may be made available through electronic means to all regions of the country. In view of current pressures on the Federal budget, a national retrieval system of this character may be an unrealistic objective at the present time; but a start can and should be made to apply retrieval technology on a more limited scale to facilitate research work in the Capitol. Accordingly, the Committee recommends that an item for this development be

included in the Department's request for appropriations covering the work of the Historical Office.

III

In previous reports, the Committee has urged that "crisis" volumes be prepared and released prior to the time that such material would normally appear in the *Foreign Relations* series. Although the compilation of these volumes has proven to be within the capability of the Historical Office, the declassification problem alluded to in this report has impeded the realization of this objective. Because of the significance of such crisis documents the Committee once again is constrained to urge that a special effort be made to move this program forward.

Largely due to the unavailability of funds, the series known as "American Foreign Policy: Current Documents" was discontinued a few years ago. Inasmuch as the additional funding required is of a relatively modest order, the Committee recommends that an effort be made to obtain the requisite support for resumption of this series, including such additional personnel as may be needed.

IV

Apart from the overwhelming problem of declassification and clearance, all other problems alluded to in this report are readily susceptible of solution. If funds are required for additional editing personnel as work gathers momentum, they should be provided. The Committee has been favorably impressed with the calibre of the Historical Office staff and its ability to meet the responsibilities thrust upon it in the President's order of March 8, 1972. As repeatedly underscored in this report, however, the Department of State cannot meet those responsibilities unless means are found to induce a corresponding compliance on the part of other agencies of the United States without whose cooperation the effort can be defeated.

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