



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

June 14, 1988

SUBJECT: Advisory Committee on Historical Diplomatic Documents

PARTICIPANTS: Prof. Bradford Perkins, U. of Michigan
Prof. Warren Cohen, Michigan State U.
Assistant Secretary of State Charles E. Redman
Deputy Assistant Secretary of State George B. High
The Historian, William Z. Slany

After welcoming Prof. Perkins (Chairman of the Advisory Committee) and Prof. Cohen, Assistant Secretary Redman explained that the Department had carefully studied the issues raised by Perkins in his letter of March 17 on the relationship between declassification procedures and the preparation of the Foreign Relations series.

FRUS Volumes to be Reviewed

Redman first took up the issue of the role of the Advisory Committee in the selection of volumes to be discussed with the Committee by the A/CDC reviewers. The declassification reports to the Committee at its past several meetings had been quite successful, and the Department was prepared to continue with them at future annual meetings. Redman told Perkins and Cohen that the Department welcomed the Committee's suggestions for the volumes to be discussed upon at future meetings. He explained that a number of considerations would be involved in making the Department's final selection, but the Committee's requests would be carefully weighed. He emphasized to Perkins and Cohen that the briefing by the declassification reviewers was the single most important opportunity for the Committee to have a clear view of the rationale for the exclusion of sensitive documents and information. This is the opportunity for the Committee to make judgment whether the procedures for review and declassification of the record printed in Foreign Relations volumes are comprehensive and credible.

High added that the process of reporting declassification to the Committee was complicated by limitations upon the availability of A/CDC reviewers as well as by the high cost in scarce resources to A/CDC of preparing carefully for these declassification reviews.

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Before responding to Mr. Redman's first point, Perkins described the intense pressure that he and other members of the Committee were experiencing from their societies and the academic community to find out much more about the impact of the current declassification procedures upon the compiling of the Foreign Relations series and the historical documentation available to scholars. Cohen observed that Perkins had a reputation in the academic community as a conservative when it came to challenging the government's procedures.

Perkins thought that the Committee would respond favorably to the Assistant Secretary's proposal about suggesting volumes, but tried to obtain a more precise commitment or agreed undertaking on the number of volumes to be recommended and reported upon. Perkins explained that the Committee wasn't concerned so much about volumes because they were "interesting" but because the issues involved were so important that the principles of selection and deletion needed close review. The Assistant Secretary saw no point in elaborating detailed procedures or numbers of volumes. He felt that the Department should be allowed to make a good faith effort, and the Committee would make its own judgment after the fact about the way the selection and review process was working. Cohen acknowledged that the Department should have the chance to make a good faith effort, but he feared the tendency would be to choose the least controversial areas like the United Nations, Sweden, and Switzerland. He warned that the first year the Department turns down all volumes requested for a review, there will be a problem.

Perkins said that the Advisory Committee would be willing to make recommendations of volumes, but its experience with A/CDC raised concerns that the final choices of volumes to be reviewed at annual Committee meetings would be the least significant and least instructive. Perkins did not wish to appear to be micromanaging A/CDC's declassification decisions, but he knew that there was in the academic community the commonly-held view, which he deplored, that the official record printed in the Foreign Relations volumes was incomplete as a result of extensive clearance denials.

Redman said he was troubled by the Committee's skepticism and reaffirmed his conviction that there must be good faith on both sides and that both sides must be acknowledged as fully professional. The Committee's concerns about the Department's declassification procedures cannot be allowed to become an investigative effort. He said he hoped we could work together as professionals. Perkins and Cohen agreed that the relationship had to be a positive one to work.

Guidelines for the Archives

Redman turned to the second issue raised in Perkins March 17 letter -- Advisory Committee access to Department "guidelines" prepared for the use of the National Archives and Records Administration. He explained that the "guidelines" are a records management tool intended to accompany the Department's permanent records when they are transferred to the National Archives. They are not part of the Foreign Relations compiling process and they in no way affect the preparation of the Foreign Relations series. They give no authority to declassify. Responsibility for the preparation and administration of these "guidelines" rests exclusively with the geographic bureaus and A/CDC. The "guidelines" are intended for use by junior archivists at the National Archives as they make their page-by-page review of the Department's permanent records.

Redman explained that the Department had selected for Chairman Perkins portions from these "guidelines" in order to make more clear how the process works in preparing them and using them. Redman emphasized, however, that this was a one-time-only effort by the Department to demonstrate to the Advisory Committee that the "guidelines" do not affect the selection of documents for the Foreign Relations series. He then showed Prof. Perkins and Prof. Cohen the current general guidelines for the systematic review of Department records for the 1955-1959 period as well as an example of particular subject or country guidelines -- in this case the guidelines for United States-Austrian relations for 1955-1959.

After scanning the examples of guidelines, Perkins expressed some relief to discover no surprises in the range of issues defined. He wondered whether they ever become more specific. He found the general guidelines so broad as to scarcely warrant being classified, and he wondered whether they couldn't be downgraded or declassified so that he could share them with the rest of the Committee. Perkins speculated about whether a broader view of the guidelines wouldn't reveal patterns of declassification denial that would be of importance to the Committee. Perkins also noted that the charter of the Advisory Committee called for it to provide advice on records policy. Redman emphasized that the guidelines were being shared at this time only to demonstrate that they have nothing to do with the preparation of Foreign Relations.

Redman informed Perkins and Cohen that Prof. Deborah Larsen's disclosure of classified information obtained at last January's Advisory Committee meeting to a June 11 session of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations undermined the Department's ability to work with the Advisory Committee in areas that involved the responsible handling of sensitive

information and worked against any broadening of Committee access to classified information. Perkins and Cohen recognized the seriousness of this matter.

Cohen explained that he could, on the basis of Redman's briefing, explain the general declassification guidelines, but he could not do the same for the country-specific guidelines. The Austrian guidelines were difficult for him to appraise; could he see, at some point, the guidelines on China -- a area where he could make a more informed judgment? The Assistant Secretary responded with an emphatic no; there was no reason for any access to the guidelines. The examples provided today were more than adequate. The guidelines were irrelevant to the compiling of the published record.

Cohen rejoined that the briefing convinced him that the guidelines were relevant. He thought that in the future the Advisory Committee might usefully see the guidelines for those countries and topics where it was not possible for A/CDC to provide an oral briefing. Cohen sought to draw a distinction between the Advisory Committee's understanding of and involvement in the declassification process in the pre-A/CDC period (when they were briefed on exclusions) and the present, and he suggested the advantages of the former. Perkins reminded Cohen of the delays experienced in the pre-CDC system and expressed a preference for the current method, but he also indicated that the greater openness of the record to the Committee prior to 1980 was desirable.

Redman recapitulated that the guidelines issue was, so far as he could determine, a "red herring". The Committee was bogging itself down in the details of these guidelines when the main issue about the selection of documents and comprehensiveness of the volumes was illuminated by the oral declassification briefings done by A/CDC. The Department is prepared to continue and refine these briefings because it is the method by which the Advisory Committee's opinion, advice, and evaluation can be obtained about comprehensiveness and selection.

Redman concluded by stressing his feeling of urgency about getting on with the larger issues of the Foreign Relations series, including reaching the 30-year line for publication and refocusing the contents of the series to serve the users better. Perkins responded by agreeing that these larger issues were important, but that the Committee had in the last several years been far more worried about their lack of understanding of the

declassification procedures. He told Redman he was still skeptical about the series reaching its ambitious publication goals, despite the Historian's optimistic appraisals. Perkins also assured Redman that the Committee would be taking up the future scope and shape of the series at its next meeting.

As the meeting concluded, Perkins expressed appreciation for the meeting with the Assistant Secretary and explained that he would communicate the results to the other members of the Committee. He expected that the Committee would probably respond favorably to the invitation to provide Committee preferences for volumes to be reported upon by A/CDC at forthcoming annual meetings, but he anticipated some difficulty in explaining the Department's view on the guidelines for Department documents retired to the National Archives. He hoped that he might receive a communication from the Assistant Secretary recapitulating the points made in the meeting.

Drafted by:PA/HO:WZSlany

Clearances:PA:CERedman;GBHigh

PC: ADCOMMTG