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Memo Re: Use of Classified Material in Published Work


The release to the public of classified material relating to foreign policy has been widespread since the end of World War II. Basically, such disclosure falls into three categories:

- 1) journalists whose material is "leaked" by those within the government
- 2) government officials who take classified materials with them when they leave office and use it in writing memoirs
- 3) historians who are given special access to classified documents

Examples abound in all three categories, and this memo will list a selected number in each category rather than attempt an exhaustive catalogue. It should be noted that there is generally no hard evidence that the security of specific documents was breached in each case; rather, the inclusion is based on a strong presumption that documents quoted from or paraphrased were originally classified Secret or Top Secret or the acknowledgement by the author of sources presumed to be classified. In several cases, such as Schlesinger's A Thousand Days or Hilsman's To Move a Nation, the author stated that the complete papers upon which the work was based are being deposited in a particular library. In one case, the Top Secret classification on a document is reproduced without any indication that the document has been declassified (Krock's reprinting of Clark Clifford's 1946 memorandum to President Truman on US-USSR relations. In this case, incidentally, Clifford has told me that he was surprised to see the document in print, not having authorized its disclosure).

In none of the instances cited below has an author been indicted or tried for releasing classified information, although I have been told (by Dick Barnet) that the State Department explored the possibility of prosecuting Roger Hilsman after publication of his book.

The books listed below are a group chosen rather arbitrarily, since time was short and each could not be combed through page-by-page. Newspaper and periodical articles are left out, because of the lack of time available to investigate them. In most cases, specific page numbers are cited to indicate the location of material presumed to come from classified documents or of admissions that State or DOD documents (presumably classified) were used in the book.





1. David Kraslow and Stuart H. Loory, The Secret Search for Peace in Vietnam, Random House, 1968.

Kraslow and Loory exhaustively document the abortive negotiating probes of the 1964-1967 period. In particular, (pp. 4-22) they discuss the classified "Marigold" file of the State Department on negotiations involving Polish and Italian diplomats.

2. George Christian, The President Steps Down, Macmillan, 1970.

Christian, press secretary during Johnson's last year in office, discusses the Vietnam situation extensively and (pp. 32-33) paraphrases cables from the Harriman-Vance negotiating team in Paris. On p. 73 Christian mentions a secret report that Hanoi insisted on a secret "minute" to a bomb-halt agreement that such an agreement would be "without conditions." On pp. 84-93 the details of a secret meeting between Gen. Creighton Abrams and Johnson and his top advisors in the White House are disclosed.

3. Arthur Bliss Lane, I Saw Poland Betrayed, Bobbs-Merrill, 1948.

Lane, Ambassador to Poland between 1945 and 1947, cites secret documents at several times in his book, and in the preface acknowledged that "The Department of State kindly allowed me to refresh my memory as to the happenings during my Ambassadorship by putting at my disposal the pertinent documents dealing with that period." (p. vii)

4. Herbert Feis, Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin, Princeton University Press, 1957.

Feis, a former State Department official, mentions on pp. v and vi his use of department documents. Although many he cites have subsequently been declassified and printed in the Foreign Relations of the United States series, a good many have not. Feis has also written books on the decision to use the atomic bomb and other topics which were based on the use of State Department documents.

5. Arthur Krock, Memoirs, Funk and Wagnals, 1968.

Krock, in an appendix to his book, reprinted the entire text of a Top Secret memorandum from Clark Clifford to President Truman on US-USSR relations, written in 1946. Clifford says that the document has never, to his knowledge, been declassified and that he did not authorize its use in Krock's book.



6. James F. Byrnes, Speaking Frankly, Harper and Brothers, 1947.

Byrnes, Secretary of State from 1945 to 1947, acknowledges on p. xii his use of department documents in preparing his book.

7. George F. Kennan, Memoirs (1925-1950), Little, Brown, 1967.

Kennan, counselor of the American Embassy in Moscow during World War II and later head of the Policy Planning Committee of the State Department, frequently quotes in his book from classified memoranda.

8. Dean Acheson, Present at the Creation, W. W. Norton, 1969.

Acheson, like Byrnes, has obviously drawn on classified material to prepare his book, although I have not gone through it closely enough recently to cite specific examples.

9. Townsend Hoopes, The Limits of Intervention, David McKay Co., 1969.

Hoopes, former Undersecretary of the Air Force, discusses the Vietnam war planning process in great detail and frequently makes use of material that is obviously classified. For example, on p. 161 he paraphrases a cable from Gen. Earle Wheeler to the JCS on the situation in Vietnam.

10. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days, Houghton-Mifflin, 1965.

On p. x, Schlesinger notes that he has deposited a completely footnoted manuscript of his book in the Kennedy Library. His use throughout of classified material is obvious.

11. Roger Hilsman, To Move a Nation, Doubleday, 1967.

Hilsman, former Director of Intelligence and Research in the State Department and Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, makes extensive use of classified material. A few examples: on p. xviii, he acknowledges the use of documents, and says they have been deposited in the Kennedy Library; on p. 33, he discusses a Chester Bowles memo on the Cuban invasion, on p. 130 a cable from Harriman on Laos, on pp. 143-144 he discloses the details on an NSC meeting on Laos, etc.

Other books which seem to me based in part on classified material include Douglas Pike's book, Vietcong, George Reedy's The Twilight of the Presidency, George Ball's The Discipline of Power, and books on specific crises such as those on the Tonkin Gulf incident (Truth Is the First Casualty, The President's War, etc.). The parallel (in part) case of Otto Otepka should also be kept in mind.

It would be a difficult task to document precisely the use of classified material in most of the works cited above without forcing the authors to disclose their notes, since in many cases documents are paraphrased, secret meetings are written about without direct quotation (would the verbatim account of a secret meeting fall under the same proscription as classified documents?).