

## FOREIGN POLICY AND THE TRUMAN ADMINISTRATION: HISTORICAL RESOURCES AT THE HARRY S. TRUMAN LIBRARY

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The presidency of Harry S. Truman (April 12, 1945—January 20, 1953) transformed American foreign policy. For the first time in its history, the United States fully accepted the responsibilities of a great power in a world that was neither at war nor entirely at peace. The Truman administration brought the United States into the United Nations, the Organization of American States, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. It extended foreign aid through the Marshall Plan, the Point Four Program, and the Mutual Security Agency. It created the Defense Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the National Security Council. And it used force or the threat of force to contain the spread of communism in the Near East, Europe, and Korea.

Under President Truman, the most terrible war in history came to an end, only to be succeeded by a Cold War that would cast its shadow over international relations for the next four decades. The decisions that Truman and his advisers made and the initiatives they undertook during those first turbulent years after World War II would have a profound influence on American diplomacy throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

The primary record of this historic period is preserved at the Harry S. Truman Library in Independence, Missouri, in fifteen million pages of textual documents, over one hundred thousand photographs, hundreds of oral history interviews, and thousands of

sound recordings and motion pictures. Several generations of scholars have used these resources since the library's archives were opened in 1959. Their research has resulted in books, articles, and dissertations that cite the documentary evidence at the library to support many divergent arguments and opinions and a wide variety of interpretations. Over the years, scholars have assessed Truman's approach to foreign affairs as incompetent, skillful, aggressive, defensive, opportunistic and idealistic.

The papers of Harry S. Truman represent the centerpiece of the library's archival collections, comprising approximately half of its fifteen million pages of textual documents. Truman's papers were donated to the U.S. government by the former president and his family. (Prior to the Watergate scandal and the ensuing Presidential Records Act of 1978, each president owned his own papers and could dispose of them as he saw fit.)

Perhaps the most important information in Truman's papers lies in the President's Secretary's Files (PSF). These files were maintained by Truman's personal secretary, Rose Conway, in an area near the Oval Office, and served as the repository of the most sensitive documents that crossed the president's desk. They remained in Truman's personal possession during his lifetime and were not opened for research until the 1970s. The PSF contains foreign and domestic policy material and has sensitive correspondence, national security and intelligence information, speeches and speech drafts, and the handwritten notes and memorandums that make up Truman's diary. A finding aid for this collection is available on the Truman Library's web site at <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/hstpaper/psf.htm>.

The Subject File of the PSF includes extensive documentation of American foreign policy as it was conducted at the highest level of the government during the Truman administration. Included in this series is information concerning Truman's secretaries of state; the "China Lobby"; international conferences; relations with France, India, Russia, and a host of other countries; crises in Palestine, Berlin, and Korea; and meetings of the National Security Council. Another series in the PSF, the Intelligence File, contains early reports by the Central Intelligence Agency on such topics as the Soviet threat, the breakup of colonial empires, and likely trouble spots around the world. The General File of the PSF includes Truman's correspondence with Winston Churchill and documents relating to his meetings with the British prime minister.

The PSF also includes many documents written by Truman in which the president expressed his opinions and frustrations about the state of the world. When Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas publicly advocated U.S. diplomatic recognition of Communist China in 1951, for example, Truman sent him a fiery letter that is preserved in the PSF. "As long as I am President," he wrote, "if I can prevent it, that cut throat organization will never be recognized by us as the Government of China and I am sorry that a Justice of the Supreme Court has been willing to champion the interest of a bunch of murderers by a public statement." Truman sometimes vented his anger in letters that remained unsent and drafts of speeches that were never delivered. The journalist Arthur Krock, who wrote a column in September 1952 denouncing the "blunders" of Truman's foreign policy, never received this handwritten rebuttal, which remained in the president's files: "Was the salvation of Greece and Turkey a blunder? Was the Berlin Airlift a

blunder? Was the economic recovery of free Europe with our assistance a blunder?"

Truman's writings often provide insight into aspects of his character and personality that affected his approach to foreign relations. In an undelivered speech drafted in April 1948 he wrote that "our friends the Russkies understand only one language—how many divisions have you."

Information about foreign affairs can also be found in the Official File (OF), which contains correspondence, memorandums, and other documents relating to the State Department, the United Nations, other international organizations, and foreign countries ranging in size from Russia to Liberia. The OF is arranged according to a numerical filing system developed by the White House Central Files unit: thus, OF 20 contains material on the State Department, and OF 134 contains information on relations with Iran. Generally speaking, the documents in the Official File are less sensitive than those that were filed in the PSF; they include memorandums from lower-ranking government officials, routine or ceremonial correspondence with foreign governments, and mail from the public. The finding aid for the Official File is at <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/hstpape/hstof.htm>.

The Confidential File (CF) contains documents that were removed from other files at the White House because of their sensitive nature. It includes extensive State Department correspondence relating to foreign affairs and international trade agreements. The finding aid for the file is at <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/hstpape/whcfcf.htm>.

The Naval Aide to the President Files, another component of the Truman papers, contains the president's communications with foreign leaders and American diplomats;

information concerning the Potsdam Conference of 1945; material on Germany, Japan, the Korean War, the United Nations, and other aspects of U.S. foreign policy; and briefs summarizing reports to the State Department from U.S. embassies around the world. The finding aid for these files is at <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/hstpape/naval.htm>.

As indicated earlier, President Truman was an inveterate writer of notes, memorandums, diary entries, and personal letters, and these handwritten documents sometimes contain reflections on foreign affairs. For example, the Truman Papers Pertaining to Family, Business and Personal Affairs include more than 1400 letters that Truman wrote to his wife, Bess Wallace Truman, over a period of nearly half a century. “I like Stalin,” Truman wrote to his wife from the Potsdam Conference on July 29, 1945. “He is straightforward. Knows what he wants and will compromise when he can’t get it.” The finding aid for these papers is at <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/hstpape/fbpa.htm>.

Besides the papers of Harry S. Truman, the library has the personal papers of over four hundred other individuals. Most of these people served in the Truman administration or knew Truman at some point in his life. Of these collections, perhaps the most significant from the standpoint of foreign policy are the papers of Dean G. Acheson, who was secretary of state from 1949 to 1953. Acheson’s papers include memorandums of his conversations with President Truman, other U.S. government officials, and representatives of foreign governments. One especially important memorandum records the discussion at Blair House on the evening of June 25, 1950, as the president and his principal advisers met to consider a response to the North Korean invasion of South Korea. This collection also contains correspondence between Acheson

and Truman that reflects their extremely close relationship, as well as documentation of Acheson's role as an unofficial foreign policy adviser from 1953 to 1971. The finding aid for the Acheson papers is at <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/hstpape/acheson.htm>.

The papers of Clark M. Clifford, special counsel to the president from 1946 to 1950, also contain important information regarding foreign affairs. Clifford was an influential adviser to President Truman on subjects ranging from relations with the Soviet Union to diplomatic recognition of the new state of Israel. His papers also contain documents pertaining to China, the Marshall Plan, and national security affairs. The finding aid for his papers is at <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/hstpape/clifford.htm>.

George M. Elsey served as an assistant to Clifford on the White House staff and later as an administrative assistant to the president. His papers provide extensive information about various aspects of foreign policy during the Truman years, such as U.S.–Soviet relations, the Korean War, the Truman Doctrine, and the Point Four Program. The finding aid for them is at <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/hstpape/elsey.htm>.

Although the papers of Acheson, Clifford, and Elsey are especially useful as sources of information on foreign policy, the library has a number of other collections that contain pertinent information about the State Department and particular countries, regions, and issues. The papers of Edward R. Stettinius, Jr. (secretary of state, 1944-45), Robert A. Lovett (under secretary of state, 1947-49) and James E. Webb (under secretary of state, 1949-52) contain a relatively small amount of material relating to their service in the State Department. Other State Department officials whose papers are preserved at the Truman Library include Lucius D. Battle (special assistant to the secretary of state,

1949-53); Will L. Clayton (under secretary of state for economic affairs, 1946-47); Arthur Z. Gardiner (special assistant, Bureau of Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs, 1945-54); Harry N. Howard (adviser, Division of Greek, Turkish and Iranian Affairs, 1947-49); Charles M. Hulten (deputy assistant secretary of state, 1946-51); Joseph M. Jones (special assistant to the assistant secretary of state for public affairs, 1946-48); George C. McGhee (assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern, South Asian and African affairs, 1949-51); John F. Melby (official, Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, 1949-52); Edward G. Miller, Jr. (assistant secretary of state for the American Republics Area, 1949-52); and Howland H. Sargeant (deputy assistant secretary of state for public affairs, 1947-51).

The Truman Library also has the papers of many foreign service officers, ambassadors, and diplomats, including George V. Allen (ambassador to Iran, 1946-48); John M. Allison (foreign service officer, 1930-60); Ben Hill Brown, Jr. (director, U.S. Operations Mission to Iraq, 1956-58); Myron M. Cowen (ambassador to Austria, the Philippines, and Belgium, 1948-53); Nathaniel P. Davis (ambassador to Costa Rica and minister to Hungary, 1947-51); Henry F. Grady (ambassador to India, Greece, and Iran, 1947-51); Stanton Griffis (ambassador to Poland, Egypt, Argentina, and Spain, 1947-52); Herschel V. Johnson (minister to Sweden, 1941-46, and ambassador to Brazil, 1948-53); Charles F. Knox, Jr. (counselor, U.S. Mission to Israel, 1948-49); J. Graham Parsons (special assistant to the personal representative of the president to the Vatican, 1947-48); Richard C. Patterson, Jr. (ambassador to Yugoslavia and Guatemala, 1944-51, and minister to Switzerland, 1951-53); Myron C. Taylor (personal representative of the

president to the Vatican, 1939-50); Charles W. Thayer (foreign service officer, 1933-53); S. Walter Washington (foreign service officer, 1926-53); and Stanley Woodward (ambassador to Canada, 1950-53). Finding aids for many of these collections are available at <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/personal.htm>.

Some of the major foreign policy initiatives of the Truman presidency are documented in other collections at the library. The papers of Harry B. Price consist of notes from interviews he conducted with many officials while researching his book, The Marshall Plan and Its Meaning (1955). The papers of Edward Jacobson, a close friend and former business partner of Harry S. Truman, shed light on Truman's decision to grant diplomatic recognition to Israel. And the papers of Henry G. Bennett, Benjamin H. Hardy, and Stanley Andrews contain information on the origins and development of the Point Four Program.

Although the Truman library no longer acquires a large quantity of new papers each year, it continues to add important historical materials to its collections. In the last few years President Truman's 1947 diary (discovered in the book collection by a member of the library's staff in 2003 and since added to the PSF) has been opened for research, as has an unpublished memoir by Edwin W. Pauley, ambassador and U.S. representative on the Reparations Commission from 1945 to 1947. Two recently opened collections of particular interest to historians of American foreign relations are the papers of Dale M. Hellegers and Richard C. Holbrooke. The Hellegers papers consist mostly of interview transcripts and copies of documents from the National Archives and other repositories relating to the U.S. military occupation of Japan and the creation of the postwar Japanese

constitution. Hellegers compiled these materials while researching her book, We, the Japanese People: World War II and the Origins of the Japanese Constitution (2001). The Holbrooke papers consist mostly of transcripts of interviews with Clark M. Clifford, compiled by Holbrooke while he was assisting Clifford in the preparation of his memoirs, Counsel to the President (1991).

The library is expanding electronic access to historical materials through its web site. Transcripts of most of the library's oral history interviews are now available at [http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/oral\\_his.htm](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/oral_his.htm). Thousands of pages of documents from the library's holdings relating to such topics as the United Nations, the atomic bomb, the Cold War, the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, the Berlin Airlift, NATO, and the Korean War are also accessible on the web site at <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/photos/av-photo.htm>.

The research room at the Harry S. Truman Library is open weekdays from 8:45 A.M. to 4:45 P.M. and is closed on Sundays and federal holidays. The room is also open by appointment only on Saturday mornings from 8:45 A.M. to 12:45 P.M. Researchers wishing to work on a Saturday must notify the archives staff by noon on the preceding Thursday. Researchers should bring some form of photo identification with them, and although they do not have to make appointments for research on weekdays, they are strongly encouraged to contact the archives in advance of their arrival. The telephone number of the research room is (816) 268-8272. E-mail messages should be sent to [truman.library@nara.gov](mailto:truman.library@nara.gov).

Over the last forty-seven years, the Truman Library has welcomed more than 12,500 researchers from all over the world. Although the Cold War has receded into history, the challenges facing American foreign policy in the new century recall in many ways the international problems that confronted the Truman administration after World War II: the shifting of alliances, the reconstruction of war-torn nations, the establishment of fragile democracies, and the omnipresent fear of a new global adversary. In this context, the documentary record of the Truman presidency is likely to remain a focus of historical scholarship for years to come.