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12 September 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Handling of Classified Material in Presidential Libraries

1. Here is what came out of a long conversation on 11 September 1968 with Mr. Evans Walker, the officer in charge of Presidential Libraries in the National Archives and Records Service. It adds up to an assurance that classified material in Presidential Libraries will not become available to the public for many years - "we are thinking in terms of 75 to 100 years," said Walker - and that CIA will remain master of the disposition and use of its own donations to the National Archives, of which the Presidential Libraries are a part.

2. The Archivist of the United States will shortly address a letter to the DCI to assure him that access to CIA papers in these collections will be kept under strict control. Meanwhile I have Mr. Walker's assurance that CIA's wishes with respect to retention of material in CIA custody for eventual transfer to Presidential Libraries will be respected.

3. Here briefly is the status of four Presidential Libraries already in being:

a. Roosevelt. The collection at Hyde Park contains something like 25 to 30 million pages. It is still being screened. Of one large body of wartime maps, for example, 90% are still sealed and unscreened, and no one has any idea when they will become accessible to the public except that it will be "long years in the future." Meanwhile only the Director of the Library and probably one assistant will have access to such materials.

b. Truman. The Library at Independence has a security vault intended to hold all classified materials. The problem here, however, is that Mr. Truman has kept many of the most important documents in his own personal possession. Until recently he occupied an office in the Truman Library; I gathered that much of his sensitive material is in this office, but it has not yet been integrated into the Library proper. The known collection contains something like 18 to 20 million pages, and there is no telling when screening will be completed.

c. Eisenhower. The Library at Abilene similarly holds some 18 to 20 million pages of documents, and sensitive materials are stored separately in a security vault. These materials were turned over to Archives about a year ago and screening began only then. It too will take many years to complete.

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d. Kennedy. The entire Kennedy collection is in dead storage, and it will not even begin to be screened until the new building is finished. Most papers are already stored near Cambridge, but documents bearing on national security and foreign affairs have been retained in the National Archives Building in Washington in case any of them is needed by the Johnson Administration - i.e., asked for by Bromley Smith. Walker believes that Smith has asked for documents only five times at most during the past five years.

(e. Johnson. All Walker could say about the size of the Library at Austin is that it will be "fantastic." The vault-space needed for sensitive material in each Library has been growing larger and larger.)

4. Presidential Donations:

"About 99%" of the material in the Libraries so far has come from the personal collections of the Presidents. It is conveyed to the Library by an instrument of gift which is so complicated that it takes several months to write. The one signed by the Kennedy family provided for access to the documents by the Johnson Administration as necessary, but it omitted to mention access by future administrations, and this problem remains to be resolved. In general the instrument sets overall policy for future handling, including rules governing the date and manner of making presidential papers available to the public.

5. Other Donations:

The archivists solicit personal papers from any person closely associated with a President. Some are still coming in for addition to the Hoover Library. Personal papers contain a great hodgepodge of materials, and we must expect that they will include some from CIA. Walker had noted a copy of a Current Intelligence Bulletin in one recent personal contribution, and supposes that there must be CIA papers in others. He had recently had occasion to go through an attic full of documents which had gathered dust since 1945. The donor's instrument of gift had placed no restrictions on the use of his donation, but a quick look showed that it contained so many sensitive State Department documents that the archivists declared the whole collection off limits to the public.

6. Contributions by agencies and departments are governed by the stipulations of the donors. A number of agencies stipulated that their material in the Kennedy Library was not to be made public for 75 years. The Atomic Energy Commission has under way a massive program for ear-marking materials for the Johnson Library, but most of it will not even

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leave AEC custody for 25 years. Walker is of the impression that some 40 to 50 reels of microfilm are being maintained in CIA custody for eventual inclusion in the Kennedy Library. Whatever criteria we adopt for keeping materials in CIA custody for eventual inclusion in the Johnson Library will be satisfactory to the archivists.

6. Screening:

The process by which these masses of paper are brought into some order is roughly as follows:

a. Basic policy is laid down in the original instrument of gift signed by the President or any other donor.

b. The Presidential instrument usually provides for a committee to oversee the screening of the collections; it usually includes representatives of the National Archives, close associates of the President, and maybe the President's family lawyer. It establishes the priorities for screening, and even this first step may take several years.

c. Then the professional staff of the National Archives, armed with all necessary clearances, goes through the collection document by document, looking at every page. Three types of material are separated out for special handling: those which deal with national security or may be prejudicial to relations with other governments or may reflect on persons still alive. Each originating agency is asked for permission to screen its documents. The screening committee meets occasionally to review the work of the professional staff.

d. The Archives people do not tamper in any way with the system of filing bequeathed by the White House or any other donor.

7. There is at present no regulation specifically governing the handling of and access to classified documents in Presidential Libraries, but Walker agreed that it would be useful to create one and that it would be appropriate for CIA to participate in this action. Meanwhile Executive Order No. 10501 applies. Walker kept pointing out that it is the policy of Archives to bend over backwards in safeguarding sensitive materials, and it was he who proposed that the Archivist write a letter reassuring the DCI.

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8. I suggested that one of our worries on this point was that a President, instead of writing a book on his administration involving security problems with which he himself was familiar, might assign such a task to a trusted associate who would not understand those problems. Walker acknowledged that this might be a real difficulty. But short of a President's personal intervention in the handling of the papers of his own administration, this danger is unlikely to arise. I asked whether there was any chance that a trusted scholar with the right security clearances might be given early access to papers on his undertaking not to quote from them. Walker replied that so far as the Archives were concerned, there is a very firm policy not to allow any individual to have access to Presidential papers ahead of the public. "If Arthur Schlesinger, for example, asked to use the Kennedy Library for research ahead of other scholars, he would be turned down cold."

9. The Physical Problem:

In general the documents of government agencies are being microfilmed by the Archives on the agencies' own premises, with portable table-top cameras dating from World War II. The Archives hope that the 35 mm microfilm can eventually be converted into Xerox copies. If CIA is able to do its own microfilming so much the better. There will be no problem in handling material which is microfilmed in batches of 5 to 20 thousand pages at a time, but the Archives urged that the reels be properly identified; their problems would be reduced if the material were properly indexed. Aperture cards would be satisfactory, and, to the extent we could provide our own Xerox copies, we would reduce the later workload on Archives.

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Distribution:

DCI
 Ex. Dir.-Compt.
 DDP
 DDI
 DD/S&T
 DDS
 D/DCI/NIPE
 OGC
 OLC
 D/ONE
 D/S
 CA Staff
 Historical Staff
 (Others to be added)

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