**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

**Record Group 59: General Records of the Department of State**
**Central Foreign Policy File, 1973-1976**

I.  Questions about the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File
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**I. Questions about the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File**

What is the Central Foreign Policy File?

The Central Foreign Policy File is the Department of State's primary record keeping
system.  Beginning in 1973, the Central Foreign Policy File consists of electronic,
paper, and microfilm copies of official telegrams, airgrams, reports, memorandums,
correspondence, diplomatic notes, and other documents related to the foreign
relations of the United States. In an attempt to utilize computer technology for efficient
creation, dissemination, and storage of records, the Department of State phased out
the paper-based holdings of the Central Foreign Policy Files during 1973.  It created a
new central filing system, then called the Automated Data System (ADS), that
consisted of an electronic index and computer output microfilm of many incoming and
outgoing telegrams and microfilm of hard copy documents.  The preservation of
telegrams in the new system began in July 1973.  Many telegrams were also preserved
in electronic form as well.  The microfilmed telegrams are found on D-Reels ("D" for
digital) of microfilm.  There is a large percentage of overlap between the electronic
telegrams and those found on the microfilm.

Beginning in January 1974, documents created on paper (airgrams, memoranda of
various types, reports, correspondence, diplomatic notes, aides memoire, etc.) were
preserved on microfilm, referred to as P-Reels ("P" for paper).  Some documents were
too large for filming and were preserved in their original paper format.  Those records
can be found among the Oversize Enclosures ("Bulky Files").

All the records were indexed into a database that constituted the main "automated"
portion of the recordkeeping system.  Metadata elements such as dates, subjects, and
document numbers were keyed into the appropriate fields in the telegram database
along with reel and frame numbers to create an index of the microfilmed documents.
Subsequently, data from the database on all records was merged with the preserved
electronic telegrams.

NODIS (No Distribution) telegrams required special handling.  While many were
preserved electronically as part of the main telegram file, beginning in 1975, they also

were preserved on the N-Reels ("N" for NODIS) of microfilm.

## What are TAGS?

TAGS (Traffic Analysis by Geography and Subject) refers to the classification system implemented by the Department of State for its central files in 1973. There are geographic, organization, and subject TAGS. The Department of State developed the TAGS system in order to have standardized search terms for Departmental uses. The TAGS system was not static. TAGS of each kind were added and deleted as necessary over time and TAGS handbooks were issued periodically. The handbooks have been scanned and are part of the finding aid for the electronic files in this series. They can be viewed or downloaded online through AAD.

## What records are preserved in the National Archives?

The elements now making up the Central Foreign Policy File from 1973 forward are:

1. Electronic telegrams designated as permanent;
2. D-Reel Microfilm (preserved as a backup);
3. Electronic Index to the P-Reel Microfilm;
4. P-Reel Microfilm, beginning 1974 (with non-record paper printouts for researcher use);
5. N-Reel Microfilm, beginning 1975 (with non-record paper printouts for researcher use);
6. Oversize Enclosures (hardcopy);
7. Hardcopy of Top Secret telegrams.

## What does NARA mean by "disposition of records?"

The determination of which Federal records are transferred to the National Archives and which Federal records may be destroyed is carried out through the process of appraisal and scheduling. This is a cooperative process involving both the creating agency and NARA. The process leads to records being designated as either permanent or temporary. Permanent records are those that have sufficient historical or other value to warrant preservation in the National Archives. Temporary records are those that do not warrant preservation past the time they are needed by the creating agency for administrative, legal, or fiscal purposes. These records are ordinarily not transferred to the National Archives.

The telegraphic communications exchanged by the Department of State and Foreign Service Posts include a significant volume of ephemeral documents as well as other documents that do not warrant preservation in the National Archives. In order to eliminate the massive volume of ephemeral telegrams, the National Archives and Records Administration carried out an appraisal of the telegrams using the Subject TAGS as the basis for determining the value of the records and segregating the permanent from the temporary. As a result of that appraisal, certain Subjects TAGS were designated as temporary and telegrams bearing only temporary Subject TAGS are

approved for destruction and will not be transferred to the National Archives and do not appear among the records on AAD.  The temporary telegrams that have been eliminated are not represented by withdrawal cards.  All other Subject TAGS are designated as permanent.  The retention of an individual document is determined by the Subject TAGS with the longest retention, so only the telegrams bearing only temporary Subject TAGS are destroyed.

## What records are designated as permanent?

All records on the P-Reels and N-Reels are designated as permanent, as are all the Oversize Enclosures, and all the Top Secret telegrams.  Telegrams with other than only temporary subject TAGS, including all telegrams with Subject TAGS covering Economic Affairs, Military and Defense Affairs, Political Affairs, Social Affairs, and Technology and Science are permanent and selected Subject TAGS dealing with Administration, Business Services, Consular Affairs, and Operations, are designated as permanent.  A list of the permanent Subject TAGS from the 1973, 1974, and 1976 TAGS Handbooks can be found at Appendix I.

## What records are designated as temporary?

Telegrams bearing only temporary Subject TAGS are approved for destruction.  A list of the temporary Subject TAGS from the 1973, 1974, and 1976 TAGS Handbooks can be found at Appendix II.

## What records are electronic?

The electronic records consist of 1) telegrams between the Department of State and Foreign Service posts conveying official information about policy proposals and implementation, program activities, or personnel and post operations; 2) Department of State-created digital withdrawal cards for the classified or otherwise restricted telegrams; 3) citations to records not maintained electronically that now can be found on the P-Reel microfilm; and 4) Department of State-created digital withdrawal cards for citation entries to microfilmed records in those cases where the citations themselves contain classified or otherwise restricted information. NARA has prepared additional digital withdrawal cards for electronic telegrams and citation entries that require review under the Freedom of Information Act due to the presence of otherwise restricted information such as records dealing with privacy issues.

## What are the electronic withdrawal cards in AAD?

Documents that have been withdrawn from the records due to the presence of security classified information or for other reasons have been replaced by withdrawal cards that serve as placeholders for exempted documents.  There are four kinds of electronic withdrawal cards in AAD.  The Department of State created electronic withdrawal cards for telegrams and P-Reel index entries exempt from disclosure for reasons of national security, privacy, and other statutory concerns.  The P-Reel index entry

withdrawal cards refer to the index citation itself and not the document on microfilm to which a citation refers. The documents themselves may or may not be declassified and released. NARA created additional electronic withdrawal cards for additional telegrams and P-Reel index references that require review under the Freedom of Information Act due to the presence of otherwise restricted information such as records dealing with privacy issues.

## What electronic records from the 1973-1976 Central Foreign Policy File are presently available through the Access to Archival Databases (AAD)?

AAD contains the fully-releasable 1973-1976 permanent electronic telegrams, the fully-releasable P-Reel index references to microfilmed documents dated through December 31, 1976, and the withdrawal notices for telegrams and index references not fully-releasable (withdrawal cards). Telegrams that are designated as temporary are not included in AAD and there are no withdrawal cards for these telegrams. Please see the appendices for lists of the permanent and temporary Subject TAGS.

## Are all 1973-1976 State Telegrams in the AAD?

AAD contains only the fully releasable 1973-1976 telegrams determined to have permanent historical value that could be exported from the contemporary Department of State Archiving System [SAS]. Thus, AAD does not contain records appraised as temporary nor does it include records that remain security classified or otherwise restricted.

The Department of State was a pioneer in the use of a database system to preserve large complicated text files and there have been problems with the data in the telegram database. Over the years, computer obsolescence required migration of the database to new hardware and software platforms. During migration, some data was lost despite the Department's best efforts to protect and recover each telegram. Typically, the damage resulted in telegrams containing a phrase such as "ERROR READING TEXT" or "EXPAND ERROR ENCOUNTERED" instead of the content of the telegram in the message text field. In some cases, the telegram may not even contain a message text field. In those telegrams with lost messages, the "locator" field may contain a phrase such as "ADS TEXT NOT CONVERTED" or "ADS TEXT UNRETRIEVABLE" and may indicate if the text was captured on microfilm. The number of lost messages appears to be relatively small, except:
- most of the message texts from December 1-15, 1975 are missing;
- most of the message texts from March 18-31, 1976 are missing;
- many of the message texts from April 1-2, 1976 are missing;
- most of the message texts from May 25-31, 1976 are missing;
- about 92% of the message texts from June 1976 are missing; and
- most of the message texts from July 1, 1976 are missing.

Can any of the lost telegram texts be recovered?

It may be possible to recover some of the lost message texts from the computer output microfilm copies of the telegrams prepared as the database was created or from the P-Reel microfilm.  If the message attribute part of a telegram record, as found in AAD, has a number in the "film number" field it may be found on the related microfilm. If the film number begins with D73, D74, P74, D75, N75, P75, D76, N76, or P76, please contact NARA's Civilian Archives reference unit for further information.  If the film number begins with D77, N77, or P77 or higher, contact the Department of State for further information.

What records are on paper or microfilm?

In January 1974, the Department of State began microfilming documents created on paper (airgrams, memoranda of various types, reports, correspondence, diplomatic notes, aides memoire, etc.) and destroying the originals. (Documents created on paper dating through December 1973 can be found in the legacy paper-based filing system arranged according to an alpha-numeric filing system.)  This microfilm is referred to as the P-Reel ("P" for paper) microfilm.  The documents on the P-Reels originally were indexed in the same automated database containing the electronic telegrams.  In addition, some telegrams were not preserved electronically and can be found on the P-Reel microfilm.  As part of the declassification process, the records on the P-Reels were converted to  non-record paper reference copies.  The declassified paper copies can now be used by researchers.  The microfilm is being retained as the archival record.

Documents considered too large for filming, usually enclosures to incoming airgrams, are preserved in their original paper format.  Those records can be found among the Oversize Enclosures ("Bulky Files").

As part of the declassification process, the records on the N-Reels were converted to non-record paper reference copies.  The declassified paper copies can now be used by researchers.  The microfilm is being retained as the archival record.

During migration of the records from the earlier platform to the current platform, Top Secret telegrams were printed out for preservation purposes and the electronic versions were deleted.  Those records now exist only in hardcopy form.

To summarize, the paper files now in the National Archives consist of: (1) reference copies of documents on the 1974 through 1976 P-Reels and the 1975 through 1976 N-Reels; (2) record copies of oversized enclosures to certain microfilmed airgrams which were not themselves microfilmed; and (3) hard copies of telegrams originally created as Top Secret (TS) and/or Restricted Data/Formerly Restricted Data (RD/FRD) documents.

For more information about the paper and microfilm records, please contact the Archives II reference section (NWCT2R) at: The National Archives at College Park, 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740-6001, by telephone at 301-837-3510, or by email at archives2reference@nara.gov.

What are the electronic P-Reel indexes?

The electronic P-Reel indexes provide citations to the hard copy documents that the Department of State microfilmed and indexed as part of the Central Foreign Policy File which are not coded as telegrams (TE) in the type field. Those records are now preserved on the P-Reels. Citations to the telegrams on the P-Reels and the N-Reels are not in the P-Reel index but they are in the telegram file. The P-Reel documents are numbered with a prefix that identifies the year in which the referenced documents were microfilmed not the year in which the documents were written. Because different offices retained documents for varying lengths of time, the P-Reels frequently contain documents dated earlier than the year in which the documents were filmed. For example, a reel microfilmed in 1976 will consist primarily of documents created that year, but may also include documents created in preceding years. In such cases, the earlier documents will be declassified and transferred to NARA with the rest of the documents microfilmed in the later year. The file number citation of a P-Reel document also includes the frame number of the first page. For example, a citation that reads "P750010-502" indicates that the document can be found on roll 10 of the records microfilmed in 1975 beginning at frame 502. P-Reel citations are available online through the Access to Archival Databases (AAD) resource and copies are also available on removable media. The documents to which those citations refer are not available online.

How do I cite records from the Central foreign Policy Files, 1973-1976?

The NARA publication "Citing Records in the National Archives of the United States" General Information Leaflet Number 17 provides information on the citing records. NARA recommends that records retrieved via online research using the AAD cite the series title "Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-1976" and the record group title "Record Group 59, General Records of the Department of State" with a note in brackets containing the date on which the records were retrieved from the Access to Archival Databases. Individual telegrams reviewed online should be cited by their Document Numbers as found in the message attributes. For example, "1974BONN00753" indicates the 753$^{rd}$ telegram received from the U.S. embassy in Bonn in 1974, while a telegram with the citation "1975STATE095768" is the 95768$^{th}$ telegram sent from the Department of State in 1975. Using this number, researchers will retrieve all available sections of multi-section telegrams and all available versions of retransmitted telegrams. Documents from the microfilm (P-Reel and N-Reel printouts) should include the Document Number or other identifying information such as from, to, and type of document (letter, memorandum, report) and the Film Number. The Film Number indicates the type of microfilm, the year it was produced, the roll number, and the frame number of the first page of the document (e.g., P740001-1234).

Where can I get more information about the Central Foreign Policy File?

General questions should be addressed to the Archives II reference section (NWCT2R) at: The National Archives at College Park, 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740-6001, by telephone at 301-837-3510 or by email at

archives2reference@nara.gov.

Technical questions should be addressed to the Reference Services staff, Electronic and Special Media Records Services Division, via email to cer@nara.gov, or by telephone, 301-837-0470.


**II. Questions about using the Access to Archival Databases (AAD) resource to access the digital records of the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File**

What kinds of searches can be conducted on the digital records?

Researchers can establish their own search parameters using any or a combination of the fields in the "Message Attributes" portion of each telegram or P-Reel index entry. In addition, the entire text of the electronic telegrams can be searched for key words, phrases, or names.

For example, researchers can use the standard Subject, Country, and Organization TAGS and query the system using the "TAGS" field. Another approach would be to use the "Draft Date," "From," and "To," fields to locate all telegrams, as well as citations to hardcopy documents such as airgrams on the P-Reel microfilm, to and from a given post for a given period. Using the "Document Number" field, researchers can locate specific documents, such as telegrams referenced in reports and memorandums.

Please note that in order to locate all documents of interest using the AAD fielded search option, you must search each of the separate electronic files separately. You can search across all files in the series by using the free-text search option from the AAD Series Description page or the Diplomatic Records series list page.


How do I search for records on the basis of dates?

There are many date fields in the message attributes of the electronic telegram and P-Reel index files. To allow efficient searching on the basis of these dates, all are in AAD as DATE data types. This means that if you use fielded search to search for a date using one of the date fields, you should enter the date in the search box for the particular field to be searched by using numbers in the format <mm/dd/yyyy>. If you want to use the free-text search capability for searching for a date in any of the date fields, you should enter the date in the free-text search box by using numbers in the format <yyyymmdd>. With either type of search, when the records are displayed, whether as partial records or as full records, the dates will appear as they are stored in the raw data; usually the raw data for date fields has both alpha characters and numbers, as in; <18 SEP 1974>. A free-text search using the alphabetic characters for a month will only find records where those characters are literally within the message text or a non-date field and will otherwise not return records that have these alphabetic characters for a month in a date field.

How can I view the full message text of the records I find?

The initial results of your AAD search are shown on the "Display Partial Records" page. The fields that were on your search page will display with the data that is stored in them in the raw data record. Other field(s) with the term(s) or phrase(s) you used in a free-text search may also display. While the "message text" field is a default search field for the files of telegrams and will be included on "Display Partial Records" pages, unless you remove it from the search page, only a part of the "message text" displays. To view the entire message text, and all of the message attributes for a record, click on the icon in the "View Record" column in the row with the record of interest to you. Since the full record is in a PDF format, you will need Adobe Acrobat Reader in order to view the document.

Can I download my search results?

You cannot download the full set of records that you retrieve in your search results. However, you can download or print each record separately. From the "Display Partial Records" page, click on the icon in the "View Record" column of the partial record of interest to you; once the full record displays you can print it or save it to your computer. Full electronic records retrieved from Central Foreign Policy Files through AAD are displayed as PDF documents. If you are interested in ordering copies of any of the raw data files that are included in AAD, please contact the Reference Services staff, Electronic and Special Media Records Services Division, via email to cer@nara.gov, or by telephone, 301-837-0470.

Does AAD search for the meanings of coded values in the Central Foreign Policy Files?

AAD does not search for the meanings of coded values. For example, if you want to search for any telegrams to or from a country, or about a country, and you use the name of the country in the free-text search box, AAD will retrieve the records where the country name literally appears someplace in the record. If the only place the country is identified in a record is in a geographic TAGS in the TAGS field, AAD will find the records only if you run a fielded search using the TAGS field with the appropriate code for the country name, as found in the Code List for the TAGS field. Therefore, using the TAGS field and the fielded search option is an efficient way to search for records when the geography, organization, or subject of your search is identified in the TAGS Code List.

Can I view sample values for fields in these electronic files?

At the present time, AAD does not display any sample values for any of the fields in the electronic files of the Central Foreign Policy Files.

May I obtain copies of the electronic files available via AAD?

Copies of released files are also available on removable media on a cost-recovery basis.

For information, please contact the Electronic and Special Media Services Division (NWME) Reference Staff by telephone at 301-837-0470 or by email at cer@nara.gov.

**III. Questions about obtaining records from the Department of State Central Foreign Policy File that are not accessible through AAD**

What records are not accessible through AAD?

The following categories of records are not accessible through AAD: (1) Documents referred to in the P-Reel Indexes; (2) the oversize ("Bulky") enclosures; (3) Declassified Top Secret telegrams; (4) reference copies of NODIS telegrams printed from the N-Reel microfilm; (5) telegrams and P-Reel index entries that contain security classified information or are otherwise restricted from public use; and (6) temporary telegrams not preserved by the National Archives.

How do I get access to the telegrams or P-Reel index entries referenced by withdrawal cards?

Researchers interested in a telegram or a P-Reel index entry referenced by a withdrawal card must submit a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to NARA's Special Access and FOIA Staff. For more information about submitting a FOIA request, please see the NARA FOIA Reference Guide online at: http://www.archives.gov/foia/foia-guide.html. Please include the document number, document date, and the "to" and "from" citation for each document in your request.

Note that not all documents cited in the declassified P-Reel Index are open and available for public use. In some cases, a document cited in a declassified index citation may itself remain security classified or be otherwise restricted from public access.

How do I get access to paper documents referenced by the P-Reel indexes?

Paper documents referenced in the P-Reel indexes which have a prefix of P74, P75, or P76 are at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, although only the P74 and P75 records are currently available to researchers. The P76 records are declassified but require screening for otherwise-restricted information before researchers can use them. That screening will take place as researchers request the records. P-Reels with prefixes of P77 and later remain in the custody of the Department of State. For more information on availability of P74, P75, and P76 documents, researchers should contact the Archives II reference section (NWCT2R) at: The National Archives at College Park, 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740-6001, by telephone at 301-837-3510, or by email at archives2reference@nara.gov. For access to P-Reel documents with prefixes of P77 and later, researchers must submit a Freedom of Information Act request to the Department of State. Please include the microfilm roll and frame numbers in any request for specific documents.

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Appendix I:  Permanent Subject TAGS, 1973 - 1976

| Subject TAGS | Field | Title |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ACLM | Administration | Claims Against the U.S. Government |
| ACMM | Administration | Committees |
| AEMR | Administration | Emergency Planning and Evacuation |
| AGAO | Administration | General Accounting Office |
| AINF | Administration | Information Management Services |
| AINR | Administration | INR Program Administration |
| ALTR | Administration | Newsletter |
| AMGT | Administration | Management Operations |
| AODE | Administration | Employees Abroad |
| AORG | Administration | International Organization Administration |
| ASEC | Administration | Security |
| ASIG | Administration | Inspector General Activities |
| BAGB | Business Services | Agribusiness |
| BBAK | Business Services | Background on Firms, Products, and Individuals |
| BBCP | Business Services | Business Consultation Program |
| BBSR | Business Services | Business Services Reporting |
| BDIS | Business Services | Trade Complaints and Disputes |
| BENC | Business Services | Engineering and Construction Services |
| BEXP | Business Services | Trade Expansion and Promotion |
| BFOL | Business Services | Follow-up Request |
| BGEN | Business Services | Business Services - General |
| BPRO | Business Services | Business Proposals and Inquiries |
| BTIO | Business Services | Trade and Investment Opportunities |
| BTRA | Business Services | Travel by U.S. and Foreign Businessmen |
| CASC | Consular Affairs | Assistance to Citizens |
| CDES | Consular Affairs | Deaths and Estates |
| CFED | Consular Affairs | Federal Agency Services |
| CGEN | Consular Affairs | Consular Affairs - General |
| CPRS | Consular Affairs | Property Protection Services |
| E*** | Economic Affairs | All Subject TAGS in the "E" field are permanent.  See the on-line handbooks  for details. |

| M*** | Military and Defense Affairs | All Subject TAGS in the "M" field are permanent.  See the on-line handbooks  for details. |
|---|---|---|
| OCLR | Operations | Military Vessel and Flight Clearances and Visits |
| OCON | Operations | Conferences and Meetings |
| OGEN | Operations | Operations - General |
| OREP | Operations | U.S. Congressional Travel |
| OVIP | Operations | Visits and Travel of Prominent Individuals and Leaders |
| P*** | Political Affairs | All Subject TAGS in the "P" field are permanent.  See the on-line handbooks  for details. |
| S*** | Social Affairs | All Subject TAGS in the "S" field are permanent.  See the on-line handbooks  for details. |
| T*** | Technology and Science | All Subject TAGS in the "T" field are permanent.  See the on-line handbooks  for details. |

Appendix II:  Temporary Subject TAGS, 1973-1976

Records on matters covered by the Subject TAGS designated as temporary may be preserved among the Department's decentralized files that are designated as permanent.

| Subject TAGS | Field | Title |
| --- | --- | --- |
| AART | Administration | Art-in-Embassies Program |
| AAUD | Administration | Audits |
| ABLD | Administration | Buildings |
| ABUD | Administration | Budget Services and Financial Systems |
| ACOM | Administration | Departmental Communications |
| AFIN | Administration | Financial Services |
| AFSI | Administration | Foreign Service Institute |
| AFSP | Administration | Post Administration |
| ALIB | Administration | Library Services |
| ALOW | Administration | Allowances |
| AMED | Administration | Medical Services |
| APER | Administration | Personnel |
| APUB | Administration | Publishing, Printing, Distribution, and Library Services |
| AREC | Administration | Commissary and Recreation |
| AREG | Administration | Regulations and Directives |
| ASAF | Administration | Safety |
| ASCH | Administration | Overseas Schools |
| ASUP | Administration | Supplies and Equipment |
| ATRN | Administration | Transportation |
| AWRD | Administration | Awards |
| BLIB | Business Services | Commercial Libraries |
| BPUB | Business Services | Business-Commercial Publications and Libraries |
| CPAS | Consular Affairs | Passports and Citizenship |
| CVIS | Consular Affairs | Visas |
| OEXC | Operations | Educational and Cultural Exchange Operations |
| OSCI | Operations | Science Grants |
| OTRA | Operations | Travel and Visits |