

European Association for American Studies – Transatlantic Grant Report

“I think there is still a little bit of a story that hasn’t fully been told”, sitting in his office at the University of Virginia, in Charlottesville, I had the chance to discuss with William Quandt, former member of the Carter Administration’s NSC some of his misgivings on US policies towards Iran, and on the way that story has been told. This is just one of the highlights of the research trip made possible by the EAAS travel grant. My thesis tries to understand the emergence of foreign policy crises, looking at how Presidents manage international and domestic risks when making foreign policy decisions. In a relatively short time (from the 9th to the 30th of July), the research trip conducted in Washington DC, New York and Charlottesville has contributed to my three case studies. The amount of primary sources has tremendously increased through archival research, and the quality of the evidence has improved through first-hand accounts of the events.

My first case-study looks at the Kennedy Administration and Cuba. In Washington, I visited the NSA where I browsed through the Cuban Missile Crisis collections, building a strong backbone of documents. I had already worked on my second case study (Carter and Iran), last year with a trip to the Carter Library. This year’s trip permitted me to access some background material on the Nixon and Ford years through the NSA’s “Iran: the Making of US policy” collection. Furthermore, I had the chance to conduct three invaluable interviews with Prof. Gary Sick and Prof. William Quandt (from Carter’s NSC). Through some ‘snowballing’, I contacted Prof. Herny Precht, who graciously accepted to be interviewed by phone. A conversation with Prof. Robert Jervis, at Columbia University, helped both to enrich the Carter case study, and to reflect on the general tone of my thesis. Most of the research trip dealt with my third case study: the Clinton Administration and Bosnia. Last year’s experience at the Clinton Library, had proved largely a failure due to the lack of declassified documents. This year, it was another story.

In the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, I consulted the Anthony Lake Papers. This collection proved particularly important for my research as it contained both materials from Lake’s Carter years and from his Clinton years, including thousands of note cards of which Lake wrote his thoughts and concerns for NSC and Cabinet meetings. Other documents of the Clinton years were available at the NSA. The collection ‘China and the US’ contained two telegrams in which Bosnia was discussed. Two collections recently opened through FOIAs requests contained documents on the US policy on Bosnia, especially on refugees, and on the early years of the war. Most of the insights on Clinton’s policies came from interviews conducted in both Washington and New York.



Me with Senator Bob Dole in his Office in Washington

I met Prof. Susan Woodward, who holds very strong views on the Administration's management of the war in Bosnia. I heard from Marshall Harris and James Hooper former members of the State Department who resigned in protest against Clinton's policies on Bosnia who are still passionate about the issue. I am also grateful to Marshall Harris who arranged for me a meeting with former Senator Bob Dole, who briefly discussed with me his role during the Bosnia war. Finally, I discussed the nature of my research and the policies of the Clinton Administration with three prominent academics: Prof. Robert Litwak at the Wilson Center, Prof. James Lindsay of the Council of Foreign Relations, and Prof. James Goldgeiger, Dean of the School of International Service.

As should be clear, the grant has enabled my dissertation to improve its investigatory depth and breadth. For this reason, I'm grateful to the EAAS as this year's travel would have not been possible without its support.