

PHELAN US CENTRE SUMMER RESEARCH GRANT  
REPORT

London School of Economics and Political Science  
25 September 2021

Henry L. Stimson, the War Department, and the Politics of American  
Grand Strategy during the Second World War

Summer 2021  
Washington, DC, USA

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This research explores how the War Department, the executive branch agency responsible for managing the United States Army from 1789-1947, performed and operated as a bureaucratic and political actor in the political and strategic debates occurring in Washington during the Second World War. As the largest U.S. government department during the war, the War Department had a compelling and vital interest in attempting to shape the American war effort. Yet as the historiography of the American experience during World War II shifts to the political battles consuming Washington during this period, how different agencies within the executive branch fought over U.S. strategy and policy has been glossed over, marginalized, or ignored. This research aims to fill that gap.

To accomplish this goal, this study uses Henry L. Stimson, the secretary of war in this period, as a lens to examine the War Department. Contrary to most American cabinet officials, Stimson was no mere figurehead. Utilizing his long career of U.S. government experience - he had served as secretary of war before World War I, governor-general of the Philippines, and secretary of state - Stimson was an active, energetic, and hands-on cabinet secretary who played a vigorous role in shaping American grand strategy during World War II. This makes him a useful tool for exploring the question this research seeks to answer. By looking at the War Department's political goals, tactics, and the outcomes of the policy and strategic battles it waged, we can gain better insight into the "Washington War" happening during World War II.

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- Report accompanied by itemized budget
  - A brief summary of Phase II plans is also provided

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**Fieldwork Summary:** During Summer 2021, I made an archival trip to Washington, DC to conduct research at the Library of Congress. This was my first in-person research trip since the pandemic began in March 2020. At the Library of Congress, I accessed the papers of several high-ranking U.S. government and military officials: Henry Arnold, Cordell Hull, Ernest King, William Leahy, and Henry Stimson. This trip helped me fill a considerable gap in my archival sources base that was necessary for me to close in order to complete my dissertation.

**Results:** This trip would not have been possible without the generous support of the Phelan US Centre Summer Research Grant. While I was in the archives, I discovered numerous untapped documents and records from several document collections that will help me provide fresh insights with my dissertation. For example, in the Stimson papers, I found he kept records of every cabinet meeting he attended and other meetings with other senior officials. These meetings are sparsely or never discussed in the usually-used Stimson diary. These new additional records provide unused details into how the War Department was operating in Washington during the Second World War. I was able to collect hundreds of documents other historians have not consulted in contributing to the meager historiography that currently exists on Stimson and the War Department during this period. Again, these findings, and this trip, would not have been possible without the fulsome support of the Phelan US Centre.

**Conclusion:** The standard accounts of the War Department in this period need serious reconsideration. In previous historical work, attention has been mainly focused on the Department’s senior military officials. This is also true of the U.S. military more broadly during World War II. However, by shifting the focus onto the War Department’s civilian leadership, and putting them into conversation with their uniformed partners, we get a more complex, nuanced, and intricate portrait of how the War Department and the Army fought political battles at home to successfully wage global war abroad

## **Phase II: Remaining Funds from Phase I**

The money released for round two of this grant will primarily fund a return flight ticket from London, UK to Washington, DC during the 2021-2022 academic year. When I was in Washington during Summer 2021, the National Archives were still closed. However, in August 2021, they reopened this archive. This is the final major archive I still need to visit to complete the research for this dissertation. The National Archives contain records from the Office of the Secretary of War, the War Department General and Special Staffs, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Once I can consult these files, I will have the complete source base I need to fully write this dissertation. The second installment of the Phelan US Centre Summer Research Grant will be instrumental in making this additional research trip happen. None of this would have been or would be possible without it.