

CRYPTANALYSIS FOR PEACETIME: CODEBREAKING AND THE BIRTH AND STRUCTURE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines how the United States used the information it obtained from the confidential diplomatic cable traffic of allies that it intercepted in the six months before and the two months during the conference in San Francisco drafting the charter of the United Nations in 1945 to influence the outcome of that meeting.

KEYWORDS: United Nations, Argentina, U.S.S.R., Poland, Ultra, Magic, peacetime, cryptanalysis, diplomatic, veto, colonies, trusteeship, UN veto, UN Security Council, San Francisco Conference.

[Editor's Note: This is one of the most important articles in the historiography of cryptology. Many are the stories about how codebreaking played a major role in wars. Only two cases are known in which cryptanalysis has significantly affected world events in peacetime. The first was the American solution under Herbert O. Yardley of Japanese diplomatic code messages which enabled the United States, at the Washington naval arms limitation conference of 1921-22, to push Japan into accepting fewer warships than it wanted. This article reports the second. David Kahn]

The interception of foreign diplomatic traffic by the United States played a major role in enabling America to fashion the United Nations into the organization it wished at the San Francisco conference in 1945. The United States, the primary strategist behind the creation of the U.N., had a war-created cryptanalytic program that included the interception and solution of the embassy cables not only of its enemies, but also of its allies and of neutrals. As World War II wound down, America employed it to uncover the interests of the San Francisco participants in order to mold the organization's charter to its liking.

Secret U.S. files recently released under the Freedom of Information Act reveal how Pentagon operatives eavesdropped on friendly nations in the weeks leading

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(Incl. TAB A)

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Date 28 February 1945
Initials C. W. C.
GSC

WAR DEPARTMENT
Office of A. C. of S., G-2

"MAGIC"—DIPLOMATIC SUMMARY

NOTE: No one, without express permission from the proper authorities, may disseminate the information reported in this Summary or communicate it to any other person.

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No action is to be taken on information herein reported, regardless of temporary advantage, if such action might have the effect of revealing the existence of the source to the enemy.

The enemy knows that we attempt to exploit these sources. He does not know, and must not be permitted to learn, either the degree of our success or the particular sources with which we have been successful.

A. MILITARY

1. Japanese reliance on surprise in Indo-China:

One of the matters in dispute between the Japanese military and civil authorities, in connection with the projected assumption of direct control over Indo-China, has been the policy to be followed toward the native kingdoms (DS 21, 26 Feb 45). A 24 February report from the Embassy at Saigon now clarifies the nature of the argument:

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DS 15,
26 Feb
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WCM)

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ULTRA

up to the San Francisco meeting to find out how they were preparing for it and during the two months of the conference to find out how they were reacting to it. These documents suggest that, in producing a United Nations that the United States envisaged, it was indulging not only in altruism but also in national self-interest. Such revelations indicate that, in retrospect, some revisions in conventional historical judgments on the origins of the United Nations may now be in order.

The 635 pages of diplomatic messages came from the Army's Signal Security Agency, which broke codes and solved intercepts, and its Special Branch, which evaluated, edited, and distributed them as "Magic" Diplomatic Summaries. These summaries reported information obtained from intercepted and solved foreign diplomatic cryptograms. Reproduced in purple ink by the Ditto process and issued daily, they averaged 15 pages each. All were divided into three categories – military, political, and economic – and, where needed, into two others: psychological and subversive and miscellaneous. Sometimes annexes amplified some items or gave the full text of important documents; occasionally maps were included. Within each category, headings described the subject of the intercept or intercepts. The scope was extremely great, ranging from German military plans as reported by the Japanese ambassador to Afghan attitudes to Japanese intelligence activities. The documents do not include any British or Soviet messages.¹

The "Magic Summaries" reveal that:

- Washington knew in advance the negotiating positions of almost all the 50 or so countries that assembled in San Francisco;

¹The National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 457 (Records of the National Security Agency / Central Security Service), " 'Magic' Diplomatic Summaries," 1942-1945. The NSA declassified portions of the summaries for me 28 October 1993 on the basis of my request of 13 August 1993 under the Freedom of Information Act. All are from 1945. The intercept numbers on the declassified portions were found in the full summaries by David Kahn, and sources in each summary are cited below by date (excluding "1945") and page. For the organization and operation of Special Branch, which produced and distributed the summaries, see David Kahn, "Roosevelt, Magic, and Ultra," *Cryptologia*, 16 (October 1992), 289-319.

(Opposite) First page of a "Magic" Diplomatic Summary, showing security restrictions. A.C. of S., G-2 is the army assistant chief of staff for intelligence. C.W.C. are the initials of Carter W. Clarke, General Staff Corps, head of the Military Intelligence Divisions' Special Branch, which produced the summaries. The six-digit numbers in the margin are the numbers of intercepts; the DS 15 may be the number of a special study and the WCM are the initials of the drafter of item number 1.

Photo - National Archives

- On key issues – whom to admit to the U.N., decolonization, the Security Council veto, the role of smaller countries, even Soviet views – the U.S. had crucial intelligence beforehand;
- Most nations, including the U.S., sought to push their own interests over those of the world community;
- The U.S. apparently used its surveillance reports to set the agenda of the U.N., to control the debate, to pressure nations to agree to its positions, and to write the U.N. Charter mostly according to its own blueprint.

Whether the U.S. was morally right to make use of Ultra - as the solutions were covernamed - is not an easy question to answer; America found itself in desperate times in the 1940s. Undoubtedly every country that had the capacity to intercept cable traffic was ready to take advantage of this capacity to ferret out as much as possible about the strategies of other governments. And surely the creation of as important a body as the U.N., given past historic failures, also merited special attention. Still, Ultra was not the proper way to treat allies and was of dubious legality.²

But President Franklin D. Roosevelt knew he was going to have a difficult time pushing a complicated U.N. structure, even if designed in large part to forestall another League of Nations disaster, through the U.S. Senate. Isolationist sentiment was still strong in the land. To make the United Nations palatable to Congress, Roosevelt, beginning at a conference of the leading Allied nations he convened on 21 August 1944, at Dumbarton Oaks, a study center in Washington, campaigned for a Security Council tightly controlled by the major powers.³ The United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and China agreed at Dumbarton Oaks to the draft outlines of the United Nations, which provided for a General Assembly with rather modest authority, a Secretariat subject to major-power control, a Military Staff Committee composed of the Big Five (the four nations that met at Dumbarton plus France, which was also invited to be the fifth permanent Council member), and, of course, the all-powerful Security Council, an 11-member body of which the Big Five were to be permanent members with veto powers.

The adoption of the latter veto provision which at first as left in limbo at Dumbarton Oaks reflected F.D.R.'s belief that the Security Council would actually run the United Nations and that, since these five nations were the only

²Under the Federal Communications Act of 1934, "no person receiving... any interstate or foreign communication by wire or radio shall divulge or publish the existence, contents, substance ... thereof ... to any person other than the addressee..." (18 United States Code 605).

³See Robert Hilderbrand, *Dumbarton Oaks: The Origins of the United Nations and the Search for Postwar Security* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

ones that possessed the forces to police the world, this prerogative was required. Extending the veto to all nations (as had been done for the Executive Council of the League of Nations) would invite gridlock and inaction. Four months later, at Yalta, Churchill and Stalin, at F.D.R.'s insistence, completed voting procedures reflecting this veto system for the United Nations.

With these building blocks in place, F.D.R. believed in the spring of 1945 that his special conception of the United Nations would have the best chance of acceptance by the other nations of the world. Not only was it in America's national interest, but it basically met the needs of all the earth's capitals. Still, he anticipated that smaller countries would fear the expansive authority of the organizing nations and would probably dispute the draft U.N. Charter. He knew he would probably have to twist arms to get his way.

The intercepted diplomatic notes nonetheless show that in the months leading up to the San Francisco conference, which began 25 April 1945, as well as during the two-month meeting itself, the U.S. used information from its codebreaking to help get its way on the U.N. issues about which it vitally cared.

I

One of the most vexing questions facing the conference from the onset was whether Argentina should be admitted. Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin opposed the admission of Argentina on the grounds that it was a crypto-Nazi country that had helped Hitler during the war. The "United Nations" was, in Stalin's reasoning, originally a wartime alliance of nations opposed to the Axis, not yet a global security organization, and thus like-minded countries should be its members. Most Latin American nations, however, for reasons of hemispheric solidarity, threatened to boycott the U.N. if Argentina's application were turned down. Although the U.S. had objected to Argentina's neutrality during nearly all the war, Washington knew that it had to resolve the question of Argentina's admission or face the possibility that either Moscow or Latin America would refuse to join the U.N., crippling the fledgling organization from the outset.

The general outlines of the Argentine dispute were known to the U.S. through the diplomatic contacts of Roosevelt's coordinator of inter-American affairs, Nelson Rockefeller. But Ultra told the United States precisely what *tactics* the Latin nations were beginning to pursue on Argentina's behalf, and what actions Moscow was, in turn, taking to prevent its admission.

Hemispheric countries, according to Ultra, already were aware that Roosevelt was sidestepping an urgent Argentine proposal in late 1944 to convene a meeting of the Pan American Union on postwar hemisphere problems. Argentina,

which had severed its relations with Germany and Japan in January, was going to present its arguments for a continued neutrality at this meeting. Instead, Washington, to isolate Argentina within the Americas to force it to abandon its position, suggested that the Latin republics that had collaborated with Washington in the war effort meet in a conference outside the Pan American Union in Mexico and there consider the Argentine request.⁴ The United States may have supposed that, once it induced Buenos Aires to abandon its neutrality and declare war on Germany, it could recast that nation into a more acceptable applicant for U.N. membership.

The Ultra intercepts enabled the United States to track the reaction to F.D.R.'s proposal around the hemisphere. For example, it read an Ecuadoran message of 30 December 1944 to its chargé in Washington, Duran Ballen, instructing him to tell representatives of Chile and Colombia that Ecuador would back Buenos Aires' request. In his answer, Ballen stated that since 16 Latin countries had already accepted invitations to the conference, he advised de-emphasizing strong support for Argentina at the Pan American Governing Board. "I therefore suggest that I limit myself to stating Ecuador's point of view without seeking to contradict the plans prepared by nearly all the other countries," he wrote in a message that U.S. officials undoubtedly read with satisfaction. Ballen then did what he proposed doing.⁵

U.S. codebreakers also solved a dispatch of 6 January 1945 from the Argentine chargé in Washington to his government. This reported that the Chilean ambassador was assuring him that the conference in Mexico - now scheduled for February - "should not be considered as an unfriendly act toward Argentina but rather as a means for reaching a solution." The Chilean soothed the Argentinian. Perhaps the meeting would "convert" itself into the Pan American Union conference on postwar problems that Argentina wanted. In a message to its Washington embassy, Chile's foreign ministry said that it had turned down a U.S. request that it demand that the Pan American Governing Board rebuff Buenos Aires' entreaty. And a day earlier, the Chilean ambassador in Brazil informed Santiago that Brazil's acting foreign minister, while not approving of the Mexican parley, nevertheless planned to attend it. In mid-February, shortly before the assemblage in Mexico City, another flurry of messages scanned by Ultra reported on new developments in Latin attitudes on the Argentina problem. Paraguay now proposed to Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela that pressure

⁴6 January, 7-9. See also "The Inter-American Conference on Problems of War and Peace. Held at Mexico City, February 21 - March 8, 1945 (The Chapultepec Conference)," in United States, Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945*, 9: *The American States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1969), 1-153; also 223-230.

⁵Ibid.

be put on Argentina directly to join the Allied war effort. Colombia, though, objected to that course as likely to be "badly received" and offered a gentler plan.

All these tidbits may have helped Washington intensify pressure on the other Latin countries, both within and without the Mexico meeting, to compel Argentina to reassess its ideological course.⁶ For example, the Chilean envoy in Washington telegraphed Santiago in mid-January about a luncheon with Nelson Rockefeller at the Cuban embassy. He and seven other ambassadors agreed there that Buenos Aires had to be told to "adopt concrete and effective measures to eradicate the conviction of all the American peoples that she has been antagonistic toward the democracies of the continent..." The relentless U.S. blitz against Buenos Aires was gradually generating a hemispheric condemnation that was starting to be felt by Argentine officials - at least those in Washington. Around the time of the Rockefeller lunch, the Argentine chargé in Washington informed his government that, while the Mexico conference would "cover a discussion of the diplomatic misunderstanding" (copying the same word as one of his Latin colleagues), his country might have to think about a compromise.⁷ By 21 March 1945, the Argentine military attaché in the U.S. cabled President Farrell of Argentina that it was "decidedly advisable" for Buenos Aires to back an idea recently floated by its foreign minister: the country should hold a plebiscite for or against a declaration of war against Germany and Japan. Ultra enhanced Washington's ability to anticipate objections from, evaluate shifts in the mood of, and calibrate the growing demands upon Argentina by, its neighbors. On 27 March 1945, Argentina entered the war against the Axis powers.⁸

Ecuador now tried to convince the other recalcitrant party to this drama, the U.S.S.R., to reconsider its opposition to Argentina's admission to the U.N. Ecuador enlisted Peru, Mexico, Cuba, Panama, Venezuela, and Brazil in this campaign. On 7 April, Colombia's foreign minister instructed his envoy in Moscow to tell the Soviet regime that if it were now to oppose Buenos Aires, "we fear it would be a bad beginning for her relations with the American countries, which, for the most part, have established relations with Russia without much conviction and against considerable internal opposition."⁹ With this information, the U.S. was in a position in its negotiations with Moscow at San Francisco to persuade Stalin's envoys to admit Argentina, thereby placating the Latins.¹⁰

⁶ 8 January, 4-6; 11 January, 9.

⁷ 19 January, 9-12; 22 January, 13.

⁸ 26 March, 5-6.

⁹ 16 April, 10-11.

¹⁰ George McJimsey says in *Harry Hopkins: Ally of the Poor and Defender of Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass.:

II

A second great dispute arose over the U.S. desire to establish a Trusteeship Council at the U.N. Both the British and French feared that such a body might force them to give up their colonies after the war. The U.S. became keenly aware of French apprehensions as early as mid-January, 1945, through Ultra. France's provisional foreign minister, Georges Bidault, telegraphed his ambassador in Washington about reports that the Americans at a preliminary U.N. conference were pressing for an international U.N. committee for colonies modeled on the controversial Mandates Commission of the League of Nations. A French emissary reassured Bidault on the matter: "The American tendency of hastening the normal evolution of colonies toward autonomy, dominion status, or independence was met by objections – and even the protests – of qualified delegates ... including ours."¹¹ But the issue was not dead.

After the Yalta meeting in early February (from which the French had been excluded), the French representative in Moscow sought out Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov to obtain additional assurances that the U.N. would not act against Paris's colonial possessions. Molotov responded that Paris should take the matter up with the White House, which, he said, was now assuming primary responsibility over the colonial matter. In any event, he informed the French that a system of "trusteeship" had been "defined only in principle" at Yalta.¹² Solutions of French intercepts revealed these discussions to the Americans.

The French later shared their concerns with the British. After meeting with British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden in London, Bidault, according to Ultra, expressed his satisfaction with the results: "Mr. Eden explained to me that the idea [of the trusteeship] was an American one and would permit the United States to lay hands chastely on the Japanese islands in the Pacific. The system is not to be applied to any region in Europe nor to any colonies belonging to the Allied countries. The English are determined that no misunderstanding arise in this regard." In their talks, Eden and Prime Minister Winston Churchill approved a continuation of France's "privileged position" in Syria and Lebanon.¹³

But the French, not convinced of the British assurances, undertook a broader offensive to protect their colonies. For example, they convened talks in Paris between General Charles de Gaulle and the foreign minister of the Netherlands,

Harvard University Press, 1987), at 382, that Stalin gave in on Argentina's seating after "both Hopkins and Stalin were willing to concede issues that lay in the other's area of special interest."

¹¹6 February, 5-7.

¹²24 February, 8-10.

¹³6 March, 8-11.

which also had overseas territories. Both men agreed, according to Bidault, on "the impossibility of surrendering to an international authority any of their colonies." By early April, Bidault wired all his envoys that France would flatly reject any plan of international control "over all or part of her colonial empire or of the countries placed under her protection." She would, moreover, uphold trusteeships for former Japanese or Italian territories. Bidault told the Greek ambassador that the U.S. was promoting trusteeships simply because it "wants to exercise influence on other people's colonies for selfish political and economic reasons."¹⁴ The codebreaking helped shape U.S. policy. Just as the San Francisco conference was commencing, the U.S. began to reassess its thinking about France. It wanted France to join the Security Council and drop its championship of smaller nations opposed to the Big Five rule. It began to ease its pressure somewhat on the trusteeship issue. America's conciliatory stance and respect toward France's amour-propre had an immediate calming influence, the Ultra documents show.

Paris began displaying more pragmatism on the colonial issue. A French official in the U.S. with experience in territorial problems advised his home office midway through the conference that France should not "turn down a text in which independence is set as the eventual goal for trusteeship, for we would be approximately the only ones to do so." By the end of the San Francisco conference, Bidault himself was imploring his delegates to get U.N. approval for an impartial commission to investigate France's treaty status in Syria and Lebanon. At the conference's conclusion, France's verdict on trusteeship was now cautiously favorable and no longer harshly antagonistic. Its delegate wrote Paris: "The settlement of the trusteeship problem fulfills in broad outlines the instructions of the French government."¹⁵ American diplomacy, guided in part by intelligence from Ultra, had maneuvered France into a satisfactory stand-down.

III

The third serious matter that roiled U.N. members from the outset was the exclusive veto power over U.N. actions that the Big Five as permanent members of the Security Council would hold. Before the conference, Washington had had hints of the profound misgivings of certain mid-sized countries about this allocation of power. France had provisionally turned down becoming the fifth permanent member of the Security Council (after the U.S., the Soviet Union, China, and the United Kingdom) with the accompanying right to the veto because of its ire

¹⁴29 March, 9-10; 12 April, 6-8; 14 April, 8-10.

¹⁵5 June, 14-15; 25 June, 7-9; 30 June, 4-6.

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B. POLITICAL

1. Gromyko-Bidault conversation in San Francisco: French Foreign Minister Bidault has reported from San Francisco that on 30 April he had a talk with Russian Ambassador Gromyko at the latter's request. Bidault's message, which is annexed as TAB A, indicates:

(101571
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a. Bidault agreed to a proposal from Foreign Commissar Molotov that the French and Russian delegations should consult together before the various committee sessions.

b. Bidault told Gromyko that he would unconditionally favor admitting the Ukraine, White Russia and Argentina to the Conference, but that France would "abstain from taking a stand" on the question of admitting the Warsaw Government. On the latter point, he "refused to yield" to Mr. Gromyko's "insistence."

2. French delegation's dissatisfaction with its position at San Francisco: A message of 29 April from Fouques Duparc, Secretary General of the French delegation, to General de Gaulle--only parts of which

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ULTRA

over its exclusion from Yalta. It criticized the veto and held to a romantic notion of becoming the leader of the U.N.'s smaller nations. Ironically, in the months preceding the San Francisco conclave, F.D.R. also privately clashed with Stalin over the breadth of the veto. Stalin wanted the power to bar even *discussion* of issues in the Security Council, not merely to bar *action* by the Security Council, as F.D.R. wished. Whatever the source, F.D.R.'s effort to get the veto in any form was in much more serious trouble from U.N. members than many historians have previously thought.

First, U.S. intelligence obtained a message in mid-March 1945 from the Chilean foreign minister offering his "personal opinion" to his envoys that "the procedure devised at the Crimea Conference [Yalta] for voting in the Security Council is not in accord with the sovereign equality of all peace-loving states and, in operation, would put the permanent members of the Council above the law which will govern all nations." The minister requested his diplomats abroad to find out how other countries regarded the special status of the great powers at the U.N. He received at least five replies - from Costa Rica, Cuba, Italy, Switzerland and the Vatican - agreeing with Chile's reservations. This group was probably representative of the 50 or so states that were to convene at San Francisco, and their reservations suggested that an alarmingly large opposition to the U.S. position was in the making.¹⁶

In a dispatch in late March, Turkish officials also expressed doubts about the voting procedures. They told French diplomats in Ankara that the setup "seemed destined to make lawful the projects of the large powers against the small - with the system of voting in the Security Council ensuring them impunity." The Turks warned that "the small states are inevitably going to be reduced to the status of satellites of the great." They also feared that bilateral alliances, as, for example, their 1939 mutual assistance pact with England, could be overridden during a crisis, say, with the U.S.S.R., by the veto. But they also conceded the "futility" of modifying the U.N. Charter. Instead they hoped to increase "the number of non-permanent members on the Security Council from six to nine in order to give the Great Powers a less preponderant majority."¹⁷

¹⁶ 11 April, 12-13.

¹⁷ 13 April, 7-9.

(Opposite) Page 7 of the "Magic" Diplomatic Summary for 2
May 1945, reporting on a French intercept.

Photo - National Archives



The eavesdropper and his victim, U. S. Secretary of State Edward Stettinius, left, and French Foreign Minister Georges Bidault smile at one another. Would Bidault have been so pleased if he knew that Stettinius was reading his most secret cables? Photo - National Archives

Likewise, France's initial worries with respect to Security Council procedures grew as the conference neared. In early March, Bidault instructed his ambassador in Moscow to advise the Soviets of his concern that, under the veto arrangement, regional and bilateral treaties could be "subordinated to the previous agreement of the Security Council." This is dangerous, he added, because the "automatic nature of regional pacts is . . . the essential element of collective security. . ." The French enlisted the Belgians and sounded out the British on an amendment to

“clarify” the section on regional agreements in the U.N. Charter.¹⁸

With such intelligence data, the United States was able to develop its arguments on behalf of the veto well in advance and thus disable the opposition. Washington contended that, as a matter of realpolitik, there simply was not going to be a viable U.N. organization unless the four or five most powerful nations received the veto. Without it, none of these countries, the U.S. insisted, would entrust any of its sovereignty to an international group, especially not to a resurrected intrusive and powerless League of Nations-like body. The U.S. Congress, for instance, would not ratify the pact and would probably allow America to return to isolationism. Nor would the Soviets join without the veto. And, as a matter of practicality, U.S. delegates added, the other nations in the United Nations would never have enough weapons or influence to impose U.N. edicts on the great powers except with the concurrence of the Big Five themselves. Finally, even with an organization that might distribute authority in a way that would seem unsatisfactory to lesser powers, the superpowers would still always remain in the dock of world opinion. This would stabilize the peace system better than none at all.¹⁹

Alerted to France's hesitancy by its reading of the French diplomatic transmissions, Washington decided to focus its campaign for the veto on Paris, which had now made itself the leader of the recalcitrant member-states. As the San Francisco conference commenced, America intensified its overtures to France to reconsider its decision to forgo its role as the fifth permanent member of the Security Council. This approach, coming at a time when France was finding it increasingly difficult to act as the champion of the smaller nations, and flattering France's pretensions to being a great power and salving its hurt over Yalta, reignited the Quai d'Orsay's interest.²⁰ The French soon decided to accept their earlier assigned spot on the Security Council. With France's decision, the campaign to thwart the veto collapsed.

French diplomats saw fresh virtues in the arrangement, Ultra showed. While ostensibly staying above the battle, they were signaling a change of heart. The French U.N. delegate cabled Paris: “However far apart we [the Four Powers and small and medium powers] still are, a conciliatory solution is not impossible, for

¹⁸ 7 March, 6-8; 9 March, 6-7.

¹⁹ Clark Eichelberger, *Organizing for Peace: A Personal History of the United Nations* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 165; Evan Luard, *Conflict and Peace in the Modern International System* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 212-215; Harry Truman, *Memoirs: Years of Decision* (New York: Doubleday, 1955), 284-285; Sumner Welles, *Seven Decisions That Shaped History* (New York: Harper, 1950), 185.

²⁰ Hilderbrand, 40, 120-121; “France Lining Up With Big Powers” (25 April 1945), “France's Position Put by De Gaulle” (26 April 1945), “France Position Still in Doubt” (28 April 1945), “Hints France Asks Major-Power Role” (3 May 1945), all *The New York Times*.

everyone is beginning to realize that the veto is a necessity and that its limits could not be further defined without risks for which no one wishes seriously to assume responsibility." Later, in summing up his country's achievements at San Francisco, the French delegate reflected: "although it [the veto] may in some cases seem an annoyance – and a very grave annoyance – it may also in others be a means of preventing the Council from meddling unduly in affairs which are our own or which we intend to settle through other channels."²¹ Finally, discussions at San Francisco had rendered moot the concern of France and Turkey that bilateral and regional pacts would be undermined by the veto. Several Ultra dispatches showed that France no longer worried about this. The American victory was complete.

IV

The fourth event of importance illuminated by the Ultra files were the chronically touchy U.S.-Soviet relations. Intercepted cables – none of them Soviet – contained conflicting assessments of Soviet intentions. On the one hand, they showed the Soviets holding firm to their agreement with F.D.R. forged at Yalta, which had included a commitment to free elections in Poland. On the other hand, Moscow's surreptitious resistance to democratic government in Poland, and its heavy-handed pressures on such border countries as Iran and Turkey, revealed a Soviet Union that was growing increasingly obstinate about its territorial security. Ironically, even after the intercepts disclosed potentially alarming Russian moves, the United States remained puzzled about Moscow's intentions and unsure of how to act toward Stalin. American reactions swung between confrontation and conciliation.

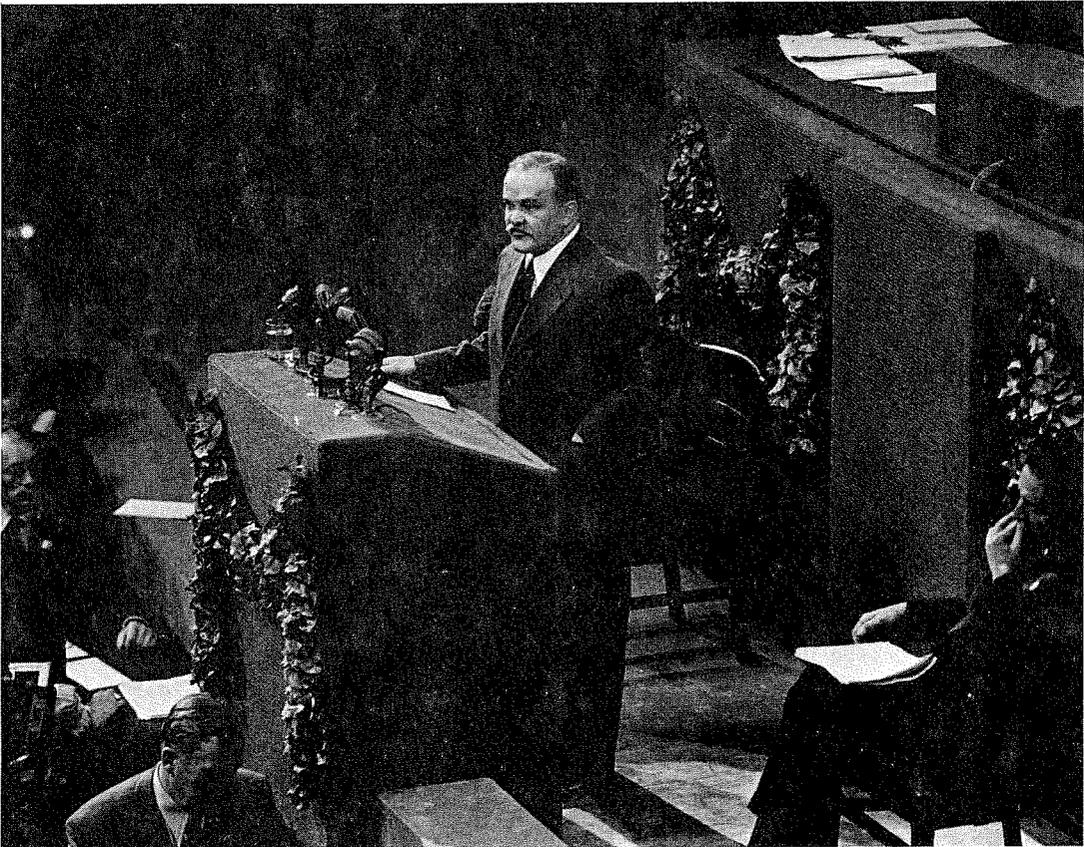
Washington learned from intercepted messages, for example, that Moscow, at least in private conversations with some European powers, was treating the Yalta agreements as sacrosanct. Just days after Yalta, Molotov told the French ambassador to the Soviet Union, according to that envoy's dispatch to Paris on 19 February, that Stalin had expressed great confidence at the outcome of the meeting with Roosevelt and Churchill. And Molotov, according to the official, said that Stalin guaranteed that France would receive "an equal place" with Great Britain, Russia and the U.S. at the U.N.²²

But Stalin was not willing to jeopardize his agreements with Washington and London to please Paris over the latter's aggressive insistence that the three powers reword the joint summons to San Francisco – an invitation in which

²¹ 30 June, 4-6.

²² 26 February, 8-10.

France had been asked to join by Moscow – to promise preservation of regional and bilateral pacts. The French ambassador messaged home his guess as to why the Soviets refused to rephrase the invitation: “I have reason to believe that at the present stage one of the prime concerns of Soviet policy is carefully to avoid anything that could weaken the assertion of perfect unity of viewpoint and action proclaimed by the Three Powers meeting at Yalta.” Why? Because, he concluded, Moscow was “the principal beneficiary of the accord.”²³



Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov at the podium in San Francisco. His cables, at least, were not read. Photo - National Archives

On the other hand, America was picking up ominous reports from foreign emissaries in Moscow and elsewhere concerning Poland and other Soviet border nations. The crux of the issue with respect to Poland was Stalin's demand

²³ 16 March, 6-7.

that his puppet regime in Lublin be admitted to the U.N. and the U.S. response that Stalin first democratize Lublin by including members of the prewar Polish government-in-exile in London. At Yalta, Stalin had agreed to a three-way British-American-Soviet commission to try to work out a coalition government in Poland. But Washington soon knew from the Ultra records and from its own ambassador in Moscow, Averell Harriman, that Stalin was renegeing on that deal. France's delegate to Stalin's puppet regime in Lublin wired Paris that Lublin's policies were gradually turning it into a "quasi-protectorate" of the Soviet Union. Meantime, in early March, France's Moscow envoy reported that the commission was "running into great difficulties" because, according to information from Harriman, the Soviets didn't like "the choice of Polish leaders to be consulted." By mid-March, the French diplomat had had conversations with Poland's pro-Russian emissary to Moscow and informed Paris that the Soviets would probably impose their own regime on Poland.²⁴

The impasse over Poland persisted for weeks, gravely imperiling the United Nations' ratification. Stalin was, according to some observers, on the edge of aborting the whole idea of a global organization – a "Western" idea about which he was never enthusiastic – over the matter. Eventually President Harry Truman, in the midst of the San Francisco conference, sent the late F.D.R.'s closest confidante, the seriously ill Harry Hopkins, who knew Stalin from past encounters, as his emissary to the Soviet leader to work out a settlement on Lublin. Hopkins, though terminally ill, arrived in Moscow in late May and conferred with the Soviet chieftain for 10 days.

Hopkins eventually obtained Stalin's agreement to a high-level meeting in Moscow on the beleaguered nation's future to be supervised by the three-way commission. The French liaison in London to the Polish government-in-exile learned of the Hopkins deal from his contacts and, in a message read in Washington, informed Paris in early June that the meeting would include all Polish leadership inside and outside the country. But he noted that the Polish exiles were disappointed that so few representatives of the democratic parties had been invited. Harriman later told the French in mid-June that "it is not impossible that a successful conclusion will be reached" at the upcoming Moscow conclave on Poland. By the end of June, the session did produce a Provisional Government of National Unity that nominally included members of all political parties; as a result of this settlement, by early July, the U.S. and Great Britain formally recognized the regime and thereafter it gained U.N. membership. Ultra had warned Washington how stubborn and unyielding Stalin was likely to be on Poland and thereby had encouraged a U.S. backdown on the issue.

²⁴ 10 March, 8-9; 22 March, 7-9.

During this time, Washington had taken its own action to ward off what it saw as a potential Soviet intrusion in its own sphere of influence in Latin America. It began to caution Latin states throughout the hemisphere against Communist subversion. Ultra revealed that a Venezuelan diplomat telegraphed his home office on 7 May after a session with Rockefeller, the coordinator of inter-American affairs, that "Rockefeller communicated to us the anxiety of the United States government about the Russian attitude." American officials, the envoy wrote, were "beginning to speak of Communism as they once spoke of Nazism, and are invoking continental solidarity and hemispheric defense against it."

Still, as the Ultra documents illuminate, even as it maneuvered its way between various Soviet moves and countermoves, the United States continued to concentrate on the main target at hand – overcoming the Soviet Union's reservations about the United Nations, especially on such matters as Argentina's admission, the breadth of the veto, and Poland. Thus it showed a distinct unwillingness to allow any of these outside events to derail the conference. While F.D.R. at Yalta, and Truman in his first days in office, bargained hard on most issues with Stalin and Molotov, both always judged that the U.S. national interest in establishing the U.N. made it necessary to accommodate Stalin where otherwise they might have challenged him.

At Yalta, F.D.R. accepted the dictator's desire for three votes at the U.N. (one for the Soviet Union, and one for each of its "territories," the Ukraine and Byelorussia). Truman eventually backed a vague settlement of the Polish situation and gave in on a host of other protocol matters at San Francisco. In turn, though, the U.S. gained Stalin's assent to what is now generally regarded as an essential international body. That that assent was a necessity was well understood even then. As the under secretary of state, Sumner Welles, wrote a few years later, without the U.N. "war between the Soviet Union and Western powers would already have been inevitable, and the fate of our civilization would today be trembling in the balance."²⁵

The San Francisco conference ended in late June 1945. Helped by Ultra, Washington by and large achieved what it wanted: a Security Council controlled by the five Allies, a weaker General Assembly, and a malleable Secretariat and military commission (though the latter soon vanished in the Cold War mists.) The Ultra intercepts gave the United States advance warnings about problems with members' admissions to the U.N., with decolonization, with the veto and with U.S.-Soviet relations – all essential to America's various bargaining positions. The Ultra intelligence thus gave Washington an edge in its public and in

²⁵ Welles, xviii.

its behind-the-scenes efforts at the conference.

In the spring of 1945, the U.S. already had a very big edge – Franklin Roosevelt had formally crafted the idea for the United Nations, he had organized the founding meeting in an American city (incidentally making interception easier for the Americans), nearly every country in the world wanted to join it, and the United States was now the most powerful nation on earth, possessing the richest economy and the strongest military. Nonetheless, Washington had to be absolutely certain of gaining its objectives at San Francisco, or the United Nations it desired might have fallen apart. America consequently used every weapon in its arsenal, including one of its most secret - Ultra. And it achieved what it sought.



Stettenius signs the charter of the United Nations for the United States, as President Harry S Truman watches.

Photo - National Archives

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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