

U.S. Spied on Its World War II Allies

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 10 — The United States spied on its World War II allies, breaking their codes and intercepting their secret diplomatic communications, newly declassified documents show.

The documents depict an enormous and previously unknown American intelligence effort. The origins of the cold war can be seen, like a photograph beginning to develop, in the 800 pages of intercepted communications from 1945 released to a historian as a result of a lawsuit filed against the National Security Agency, the principal United States surveillance and communications-interception agency.

For example, American intelligence officers read the private communications of the French leader, Gen. Charles de Gaulle. They came to understand France's fury at President Franklin D. Roosevelt's refusal to support its wish to rule Indochina. After Roosevelt died, the United States gave its blessing to France's return to Indochina, in large part to win French solidarity against the Soviet Union.

The documents also show that the United States had information suggesting that top members of the Japanese Army were willing to surrender more than three months before the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki 48 years ago.

"Since the situation is clearly recognized to be hopeless, large sections of the Japanese armed forces would not regard with disfavor an American request for capitulation even if the terms were hard," a German diplomat reported to Berlin after talking with a ranking Japanese naval officer on May 5, 1945, three days before Germany itself surrendered.

Passed Up Chain of Command

United States intelligence analysts underscored this information as they passed it up the chain of command, the records show.

The question of whether the atomic bombs were necessary to end World War II in the Pacific is the subject of unending debate among historians. Many United States officials believed that the alternatives were atom bombs or an invasion of the Japanese mainland.

"We anticipated that we would have losses of 500,000 killed or wounded, and the Japanese perhaps 10 times that many," said Andrew Goodpaster, who in 1945 was a general concerned with strategic planning under the Army

Chief of Staff, Gen. George C. Marshall. The historian who filed suit to obtain the documents is Gar Alperovitz, a fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington who has argued that political considerations overwhelmed military imperatives in the decision to use the atomic bomb.

"Every new fragment of secret information suggests the Hiroshima decision was totally unnecessary," Mr. Alperovitz said. "With the cold war over, it's high time we cracked open all the secrets that have been kept from the American people."

For three years the National Security Agency fought release of these intercepts, which Mr. Alperovitz sought under the Freedom of Information Act, saying their release would cause "grave damage" to national security.

Long List of Nations

Camille Branch, a representative of the N.S.A., which conducts all of the

Was Japan ready to quit before Hiroshima?

nation's electronic eavesdropping, said the disclosure represented "an unusually large release" of information by the N.S.A.

The documents, part of a collection known as the Magic intercepts, reflect American spying on Belgium, Bolivia, Bulgaria, Chile, China, Colombia, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, Finland, France, Greece, Iran, Italy, Liberia, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Switzerland, Syria, Turkey, Uruguay, Venezuela and Yugoslavia, as well as on Germany and Japan, in 1945.

Intelligence veterans said it was natural that all nations spied as assiduously as possible on their allies as well as their enemies.

"It's an old saying: a nation does not have friends, it has interests," said Thomas Polgar, a 40-year veteran of United States intelligence. "You spy wherever you have interests. Spying is limited only by the availability of resources. If you have the resources to do it, you do it."

The communications of two major wartime allies — Britain and the Soviet Union — are not represented in the

intercepts selectively released by the N.S.A. But they do reveal that the United States knew what the Soviets were telling other countries by reading ambassadors' wartime communiqués.

"Stalin called me to the Kremlin," the Mexican Ambassador to Moscow reported back to Mexico City in January 1945. "American problems were extensively discussed." Stalin took a special interest in "the possibilities of closer cooperation between Mexico and the U.S.S.R. after the war," the ambassador reported.

By reading such communiqués, the United States learned what the Soviets' negotiating positions were for the division of the postwar world.

The documents also show that the United States analyzed the thoughts of Latin American diplomats to help devise pacts giving Washington a free hand to intervene in Latin America, while opposing similar Soviet spheres of influence in Europe.

One tap reveals a Venezuelan diplomat reporting to his government on a meeting with Assistant Secretary of State Nelson A. Rockefeller.

"Rockefeller communicated to us the anxiety of the United States Government about the Russian attitude," the Foreign Minister reported on May 7, 1945. United States officials, he said, were "beginning to speak of Communism as they once spoke of Naziism, and are invoking continental solidarity and hemispheric defense against it."

That solidarity was an American goal in the creation of the United Nations, and in particular in the drafting of Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, which recognized the right of "collective self-defense." It was the legal basis for American intervention in the Korean War and the Persian Gulf war.

In May 1945, as the United Nations took shape, the United States knew the negotiating positions of nearly every important member state, the documents show. That was useful to two men who read the Magic intercepts, John J. McCloy, the Assistant Secretary of War, and Henry Stimson, the Secretary of War.

Mr. McCloy was drafting Article 51 in May 1945 when he telephoned Mr. Stimson.

"I've been taking the position that we ought to be able to have our cake and eat it too, that we ought to be free to operate under this regional arrangement in South America, and at the same time intervene promptly in Europe," Mr. McCloy said to Mr. Stimson, according to his biographer, Kai Bird.