

Zimmermann Telegram: The Original Draft

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Abstract This article presents the original draft of the Zimmermann telegram from 1917 in facsimile. Its various annotations provide interesting insights, such as the idea to promise California to Japan and instructions concerning transmission and encryption. Further documents clarify how the telegram was sent and put various alternatives suggested in the literature to rest. The political background and fallout in Germany are discussed, as well.

Keywords codebook, cryptanalysis, First World War, Room 40, Zimmermann telegram

1. Introduction

No single event decided the outcome of the First World War 1914–1918. But the entry of the United States as a belligerent—after long hesitation—played a major role in the success of the Entente, originally led by France and Great Britain. And the (in)famous telegram discussed in this article played a role in changing the anti-war attitude in large parts of the US population and giving President Thomas Woodrow Wilson the popular and political majority for entry into the war on the side of the Entente, clenching its victory. David Kahn has called the cryptanalytic solution the *greatest intelligence coup of all time* [27, p. 143]. The telegram is an instructive display of German failures and British successes, both in cryptology and in diplomacy.

In January 1917, hoping to break the stalemate of the bloody trench battles in Northern France and Belgium, the German military wanted to force Great Britain into submission by cutting her lifelines to North America by all-out submarine attacks. A concern of some politicians—less so of the generals—was that this might lead the US into the war, while Wilson had declared them *too proud to fight*—so far. The US Senate voted in favor of the war resolution on 4 April 1917, the House of Representatives on 6 April, and Wilson signed the declaration on the same day; see Lansing [30, p. 244].

The German diplomats tried to create a diversion by dragging the Mexicans into the fray. Arthur Zimmermann, secretary of state for foreign affairs since 25 November 1916, sent a top secret message to the German minister in Mexico, Heinrich von Eckardt, via the German ambassador in Washington, Graf Johann Heinrich Andreas Hermann Albrecht von Bernstorff, on 16 January 1917. He offered, if war with the US broke out, money to the Mexican President Venustiano Carranza and consent for Mexico to regain the states of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, which had been conquered by the US in the war of 1846–1848 with Mexico. The encrypted telegram was solved by Room 40, the cryptanalytic Black Chamber of the British Navy, and

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passed to the American ambassador in London, Walter Hines Page. Wilson asked the US Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, to give it to the press for publication on 1 March 1917 [30, page 229]. The ensuing public outcry was one of the factors that eventually led to the declaration of war against Germany by the US Congress on 6 April 1917.

The main points of the article are:

- a presentation of the original draft of the Zimmermann telegram;
- information from this draft and other documents about German options for diplomatic communications;
- insights into internal processing at the German foreign office including a note on *reserving California for Japan*;
- proof that the telegram was transmitted from Berlin to Washington only in code 0075 over US diplomatic lines; and
- an excerpt from a German parliamentary discussion.

This article is structured as follows. Section 2, titled *The Telegram*, presents in facsimile the original draft of the Zimmermann telegram, from the Göppert file in the archives of the German foreign office containing the results of an investigation made in 1917. The Göppert Report consists of pages 210–226 of the 281-page record Abt. IA, Mexiko 16 secr., R 16919 (called the *Göppert file* in this article) of the Auswärtiges Amt–Politisches Archiv (abbreviated as AA–PA below), Berlin. The original Zimmermann telegram is presented in Figures 1 through 3. Its text is reprinted in [8, II. Beilagen, Teil VIII, No. 235, pp. 337–338], and contains, in addition to the text as given here, instructions to forward it to Mexico, and minor variations like *erhalten* for *halten*, and in punctuation. This report has been used by Nassua [37]. Its body is the well-known telegram, but in addition, the draft provides valuable information about transmission and encryption, as well as a related message to von Bernstorff which was, however, never sent. The literature about the Zimmermann telegram is substantial, but besides Nassua’s Master’s thesis [37], none of this additional material seems to have been published. Section 3, titled *German Options for Encryption and Transmission*, presents the various options of the German foreign office for encryption and transmission. Section 4, titled *From Pleß to Washington and Mexico City*, discusses some of the background and how the telegram was sent via US diplomatic channels. Documents kindly furnished by the German foreign office debunk the myth of alternative routes, including the so-called Swedish roundabout. Section 5, titled *London and Washington*, deals with British cryptanalytic and American political action. The fallout in Germany makes up most of Section 6, titled *Berlin*.

Publications about the Zimmermann telegram are plentiful. The first works were the biographies or autobiographies of von Bernstorff [2], Hendrick [20], Seymour [41], and Lansing [30]. Next came the cryptographic analysis of Friedman and Mendelsohn [17], the political circumstances in Tuchman [46], and the comprehensive treatment in Kahn [26]. Further contributions were Nassua [37], who wrote on the reaction of the German-language press in the US, as well as the debates in the Reichstag committee, and Kahn’s [27] publication of memoranda by Bell and de Grey. More recently, Nickles [38] examines the influence of the telegraph on diplomacy and cites extensively from the Göppert file; Boghardt [5] studies the political background; and Freeman [16] presents several newly discovered documents. Other works are cited in the text.

2. The Telegram

Figures 1 through 3 show the hand-written final draft of the notorious Zimmermann telegram. It contains an additional message to von Bernstorff explaining the instructions given to von Eckardt. This addition was never sent and is not mentioned in the literature.

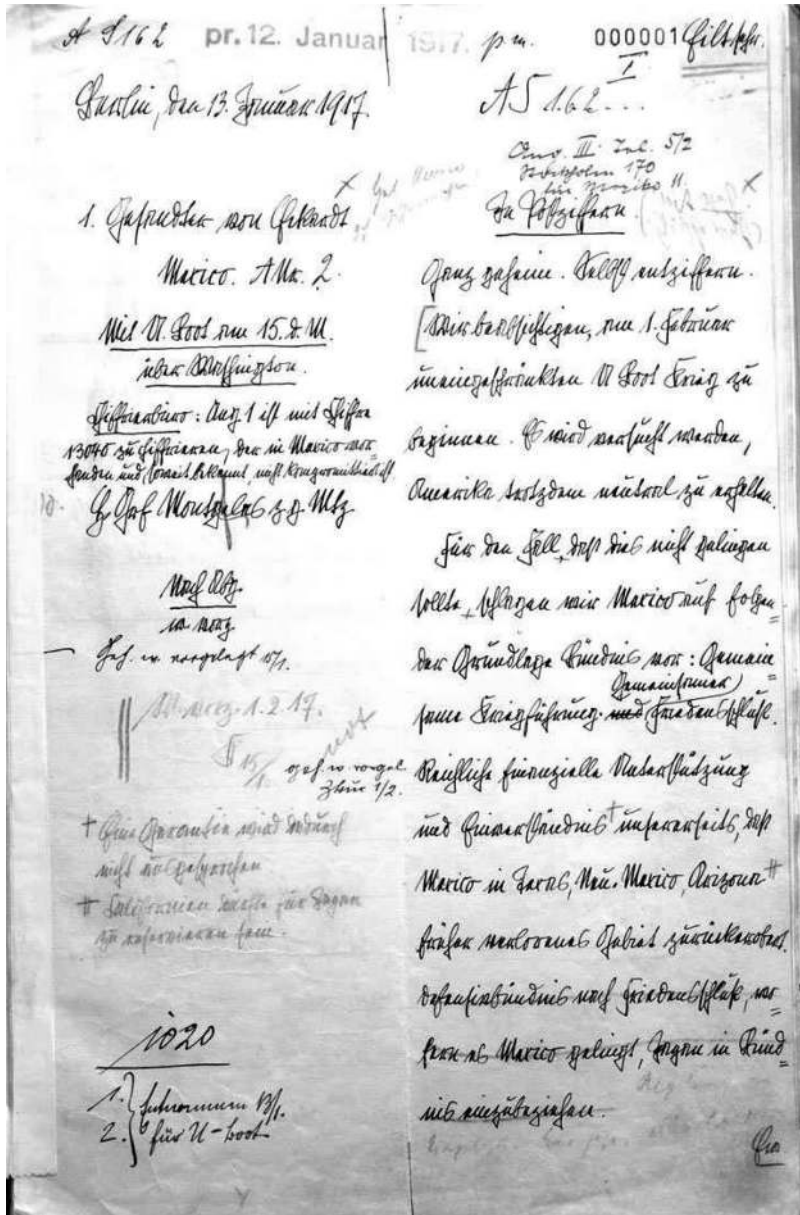


Figure 1. The first page of the Zimmermann telegram, as prepared at the German foreign Office.

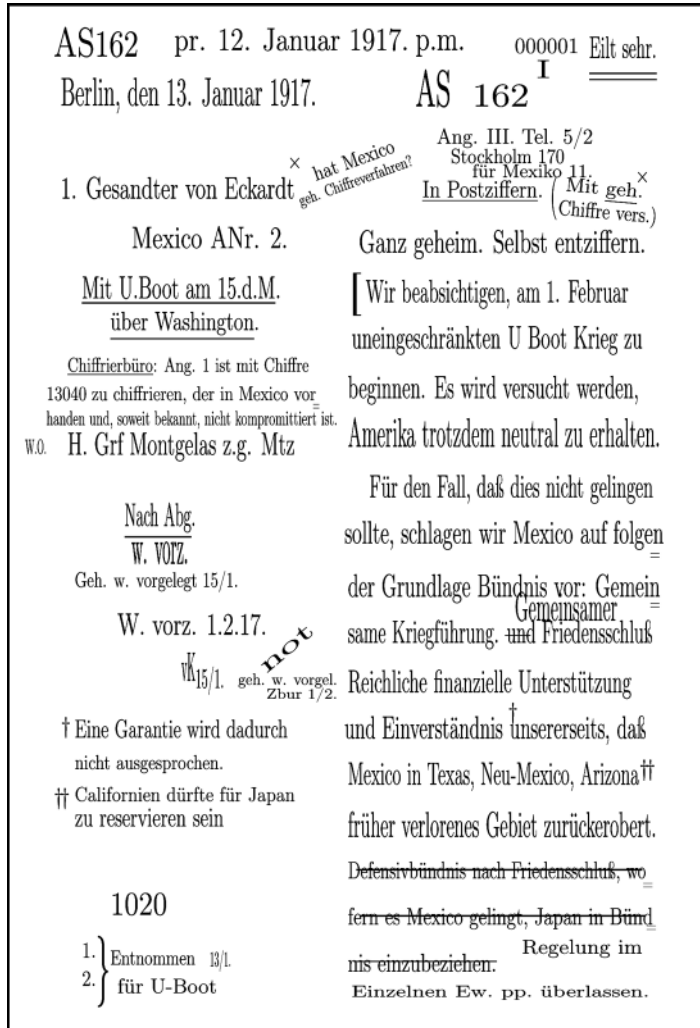


Figure 1a. Transcription of the first page.

The draft comprises 3 pages, the last of which has its bottom half blank. We present 3 figures for each page: first a photograph of the original, then a (German) transcription, and finally a translation into English. Two doubtful readings are indicated with an “[?]”. Some parts in light blue pencil are easy to read in the original but not in the photograph.

The right-hand column of the first page and a half contain the well-known text of the telegram. We now discuss some of the rather cryptic annotations and, briefly, the persons involved.

Figure 1 contains various instructions concerning encryption and transmission; they will be discussed in Section 4. The center of the left column relates, in a highly abbreviated fashion, the voyage of the document through the various levels of the bureaucracy: *Herrn Graf Montgelas zur gefälligen Mitzeichnung. Nach Abgang wieder*

AS162 presented 12 January 1917 p.m. 000001 Very urgent.
 Berlin, 13 January 1917. AS 162 ^I

1. Minister von Eckardt ^x is the secret cipher available in Mexico? Part III. Telegram 5/2 Stockholm 170 for Mexico 11. In cipher. ^x (send with secret cipher)

Mexico ANr. 2. Most secret. Decipher yourself.

By U-boat on the 15th
via Washington. [We intend to begin on the first of February unrestricted submarine warfare.

To the cipher bureau: Document 1 is to be encrypted with code 13040, which is available in Mexico and, as far as is known, is not compromised. We shall endeavour nonetheless to keep America neutral.

w.o. Grf Montgelas to kindly co-sign

After expedition
 to be presented again
 Most obediently presented again 15/1.

To be presented again 1.2.17.

VK 15/1. ^{noted} most obediently presented again Main office 1/2.

† No guarantee is expressed hereby

‡ California should be reserved for Japan

1020

1. } Removed 13/1.
 2. } for U-boat

In the event of this not succeeding, we propose to Mexico an alliance on the following basis:
 Conduct war jointly. Conclude peace jointly.
 Substantial financial support and consent on our part for Mexico to reconquer lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona.
 Defense treaty after conclusion of peace provided Mexico succeeds in drawing Japan into the alliance. The settlement in detail is left to your Excellency.

Figure 1b. English Translation of the first page.

vorzulegen. Gehorsamst wieder vorgelegt 15/1. Wieder vorzulegen 1.2.17. [initial of von Kemnitz] 15/1. gehorsamst wieder vorgelegt Zentralbureau 1/2. Notiert. That is, Montgelas was requested to co-sign the draft of 13 January, an instruction to present it again after transmission was most obediently executed on the 15th, and then again

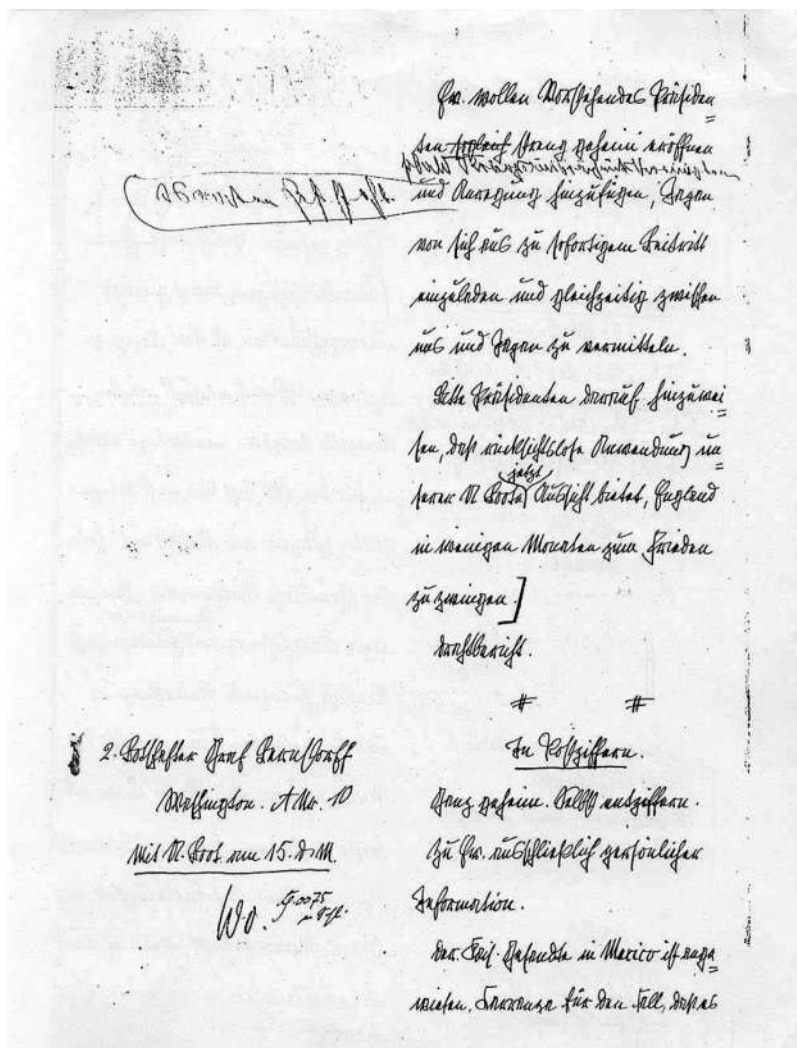


Figure 2. The second page is comprised of the final part of the Zimmermann telegram and the first part of the separate message to von Bernstorff.

most obediently on 1 February by the Central Office, at von Kennnitz’ instruction from the 15th. The *not* presumably refers to the request being noted in the diary of the Zentralbureau.

The page number 000001 in the first line was added when the Göppert Report was bound together in its present form. The term *Postziffern* literally means *postal ciphers* and was presumably used at the time for ciphers or codebooks. Contemporary encyclopedias (Brockhaus 13th (1886), 14th (1908), and 15th (1933) editions; Meyers Großes Konversationslexikon 3rd (1875), 6th (1904), and 7th (1926) editions; Zedlers Universallexikon, 1741) do not contain an entry for this word. The *Ew. pp.* in the last line of Figure 1 is an Imperial macro which expands to *the title of the addressee of this document*. Literally, it reads:

| | |
|--|---|
| Staaten feststeht | <p>Ew. wollen Vorstehendes Präsi- = ten sogleich streng geheim eröffnen sobald Kriegsausbruch mit Vereinigten und Anregung hinzufügen, Japan von sich aus zu sofortigem Beitritt einzuladen und gleichzeitig zwischen uns und Japan zu vermitteln.</p> |
| <p>2. Botschafter Graf Bernstorff Washington. ANr.10 Mit U-Boot am 15.d.M.</p> | <p>Bitte Präsidenten darauf hinzuwei- = sen, daß rücksichtslose Anwendung un- = serer U Boote ^{jetzt} Aussicht bietet, England in wenigen Monaten zum Frieden zu zwingen.]</p> |
| <p>W.V. ^{Lg. [?] 0075} Schl.[?]</p> | <p>Drahtbericht. # # In Postziffern. Ganz geheim. Selbst entziffern. Zu Ew. ausschließlich persönlicher Information. Der Kais. Gesandte in Mexico ist ange- = wiesen, Carranza für den Fall, daß es</p> |

Figure 2a. Transcription of the second page.

Ew. = Euer Durchlaucht/Hochwohlgeboren/etc.,
 pp. = *præmissis præmittendis*, meaning something like *supposing*
that what should have been said ahead has been said ahead.

Well, republics have to do without such official prose.

The numbers on the telegram require some explanation. Their system is somewhat involved, but the careful log books based on cross-references to such numbers

Your Excellency will present to the

President immediately the above most secretly
as soon as the outbreak of war with
the United States is certain, and add the suggestion that

he should, on his own initiative, invite Japan
to immediate adherence, and at the
same time mediate between Japan and ourselves.

Please call the President's attention to the fact
that the ruthless employment
of our submarines offers the prospect of
^{now}compelling England in a few months
to make peace.]

Telegram.

#

In cipher.

2. Ambassador Graf Bernstorff

Washington. ANr.10

Most secret. Decrypt yourself.

With U-boat on the 15th of this month

Personal information for your
Excellency only.

The Imperial envoy in Mexico is instructed to
propose to Carranza an alliance, in case

Present again ^{Lg [?] 0075} _{Schl. [?]}

Figure 2b. English translation of the second page.

will help us, in Section 4, to solve the mystery of the Swedish roundabout. The foreign office was divided into several departments, IA (one-A) being the Political Department (Politische Abteilung). Each file received a serial number, its Journalnummer. At the top left of Figure 1, we see AS 162, and in the second line at right AS 162¹. The dotted lines left by the original scribe are still visible, which implicitly asked for a serial number to be put in. The AS stands for IAS and means Political

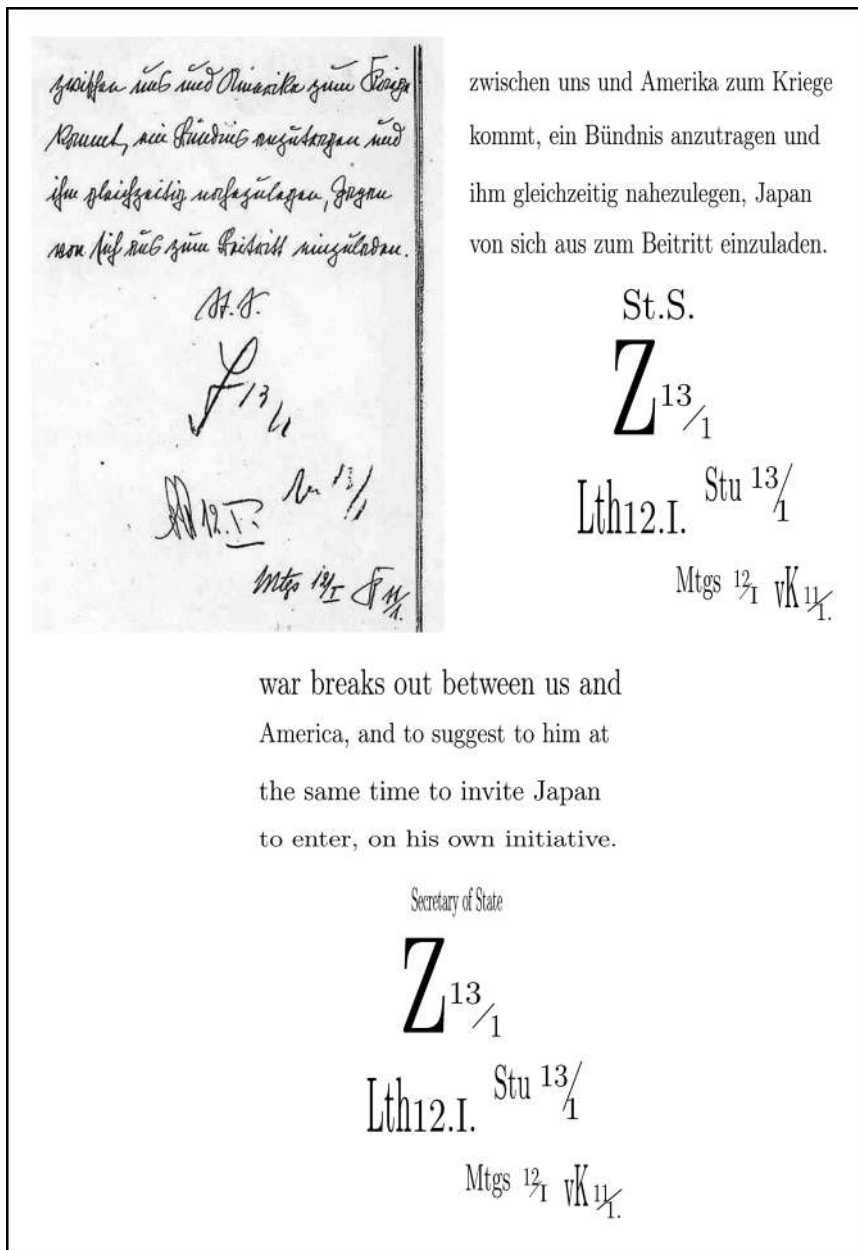


Figure 3. The third page contained the last part for von Bernstorff, and the initials of the officials at the foreign office.

Department secret. 162 is the running number. Various parts (*Angaben*) of the same file were denoted by superscripts I, II, III, . . . The Zimmermann telegram is AS 162^I. Near the top of the right hand column, we also read *Angabe III. Telegram 5/2. Stockholm 170 für Mexico 11*. This actually refers to a different message, designated as AS 162^{III} and sent as a telegram on 5 February (text is given on page 21).

A second type of numbering was given to the more important instructions called *Erlaß* (order). Figure 1 is identified in the left column as *Mexiko ANr. 2*, order number 2 for Mexico. Similarly, the second telegram is identified as *Washington ANr. 10*. Both orders were actually not sent, as will become clear late in Section 4. In a third type of numbering, telegrams were designated by their destination and a serial number. The latter restarted at the beginning of a year. File AS 162^{III} is designated both as *Stockholm 170* and as *Mexiko 11* in Figure 1 at top right. It was thus sent to Sweden as No. 170 and thence on to Mexico, now bearing the number 11. We will see more such numbers later. The number 1020 at bottom left in Figure 1 remains unexplained.

The initials on the last page are, in chronological order from right to left and from the bottom up: vK (Hans Arthur von Kemnitz) 11/1., Mtgs (Adolf Graf von Montgelas) 12/I, Lth (Ernst Freiherr Langwerth von Simmern) 12. I., Stu (Wilhelm August von Stumm) 13/1, Z (Zimmermann) 13/1, and St. S. [Staatssekretär = Secretary of State]. My designations vK, Mtgs, Lth, Stu, Z identify the initialers but do not pretend to be the actual letters that they wrote. An (unidentified) initial W. O. occurs twice: in Figure 2 at bottom left, and in Figure 1 at center left. In the reproduction, only the second half of the latter is visible because the first part was covered by the tape with which the page was glued into the record. In the original, it shines through the tape.

Von Kemnitz had been a Ständiger Hilfsarbeiter (Permanent Assistant) since January 1913 in the German foreign office and directed the Far Eastern and Latin American (except Mexico) department. The telegram was probably his brainchild. Boghardt [5, pp. 8–9], presents evidence for von Kemnitz' authorship of the telegram. Kurt Riezler, von Bethmann Hollweg's personal secretary, noted in his diary on 4 March 1917 that *Kemnitz, that phantastic idiot* did it; see Riezler [39] and Nassua [37, p. 33]. In a letter dated 24 November 1918, von Kemnitz still thinks that the telegram was a great idea and only its publication damaging; see Nassua [37, p. 22], and AA-PA, Mexico Nr. 16, Band 2.

Graf Montgelas had worked in the diplomatic service since February 1911. Langwerth had travelled widely and had been, since 1916, Director of the Political Department in the foreign office. Von Stumm directed the Political Department 1911–1916, and was Undersecretary of State 1916–1918.

Arthur Zimmermann started his career in the consular service of the German foreign office, moved to the diplomatic branch in 1901 and became Undersecretary in 1911. In the absence of foreign minister Gottlieb von Jagow, Zimmermann drafted in July 1914 the telegram (!) in which the German government guaranteed support to Austria, ultimately leading to the military adventure that toppled the two monarchies. During the U-boat discussions in 1916, von Jagow opposed the military and was forced to resign. Zimmermann was appointed on 25 November 1916 as Secretary of State—the first commoner to rise to this position. He lost office on 5 August 1917 and died in Berlin in 1940.

Von Bernstorff was German ambassador in Washington from 1908 to 1917. He worked hard trying to avoid war between Germany and the US, attempting to mediate in peace initiatives and alerting his government to the dire consequences of the US entering the war. He warned particularly strongly against unbridled submarine warfare—to no avail. No one who reads von Bernstorff's telegrams can remain unconvinced of his absolutely sincere desire for peace between the United States and Germany [17, p. 44, fn. 70]. He was a tragic figure.

Outside business hours, he was a society lion, at ease in the leading East Coast circles. His social life is illustrated in Tuchman [46] with a vacation photograph (opposite page 181 and described on page 125) of the debonaire von Bernstorff embracing two attractive and skimpily clad society ladies.

After the war, he continued his efforts as president of the German Association for the League of Nations, but peaceful goals were not really popular at that time. He emigrated in 1933 and died in Geneva in 1939. His nephew Albrecht was murdered by Nazi henchmen on 23/24 April 1945; see Doerries [10].

Doerries [9] is a masterful study of von Bernstorff and German politics in the USA during this period. Several of the telegrams are printed in *Deutsche Nationalversammlung* [8]; further information is in *Der Große Brockhaus*, 20. Auflage, and Keipert and Grupp [29]. The 1936 edition of his letters [3] is dedicated *to his beloved wife, who has shouldered all disappointments of life courageously with him*, and the frontispiece photograph shows the grief-stricken face of von Bernstorff from which the joy of life has disappeared.

Von Eckardt started his diplomatic career as Dragomanats-Eleve (translator-student of oriental languages) in Constantinople in 1886, and became minister to Mexico on 14 February 1915. As a minister (*Gesandter* in German), the envoy in Mexico had a lower status than the ambassador (*Botschafter*) in Washington. In 1924–1925 he was the German representative at the Opium conference, and later at the Arms Trade conference.

3. German Options for Encryption and Transmission

Several versions have been proposed of how the Zimmermann telegram might have been encrypted and transmitted by the Germans and cryptanalyzed by the British. This section investigates the full range of possibilities, namely for encipherment in Berlin the two major German diplomatic codes called 0075 and 13040, and for the transmission route, the following four choices:

- US diplomatic cable;
- Swedish roundabout Berlin–Stockholm–Buenos Aires–Washington;
- radio Nauen–Sayville; and
- U-boat *Deutschland*.

Foreign office files discussed below show that the telegram went to Washington in 0075 over US diplomatic lines, and no other way.

We start with the transmission options. On 5 August 1914, just after England's ultimatum had expired at midnight, the British ship *Telconia* severed the two transatlantic cables (Tuchman [46, pp. 10–11]; Meister [31, pp. 10, 18]) linking Emden in Germany via the Azores to America.

Now how could the Kaiser speak to his most obedient underlings in Washington?

US Diplomatic Cable

A diplomatic crisis opened up a channel. Namely, on 7 May 1915 the German submarine *U-20* sunk the passenger ship *Lusitania*, causing a loss of 1400 lives; the literature is abundant; see e.g., Beesly [1, pp. 84–122].

The *Lusitania* was outfitted as an auxiliary cruiser and carried 2160 passengers and ammunition stores. The German government, concerned that the United States

might enter the war, agreed after protracted negotiations to curb its submarine warfare in the North Atlantic. During this crisis, the US State Department transmitted—from time to time—German code messages on its diplomatic cable Washington–London–Copenhagen–Berlin at the instigation of Colonel Edward Mandell House, an influential advisor of President Wilson. Friedman and Mendelsohn [17, p. 22, fn. 34] found a message dated 12 November 1914 and encrypted with code 13040 that went from Washington to Berlin on US diplomatic cable. Tuchman [46, p. 133], cites von Bethmann Hollweg: the US government *permitted us to make use of their embassy here for the purpose of correspondence in cipher*. On 14 October 1916, he asked von Bernstorff to ensure regular telegraphic communication via the State Department and the US embassy in Berlin [8, II. Beilagen, Teil I, No. 23, pp. 18–19]. Diplomatic dispatches were posted at a telegram office and transmitted over a physical line belonging to a private company. All such transatlantic lines made a landfall in the UK Von Bernstorff [2, c. 6, p. 152] writes about an interview of his with President Wilson on 2 June 1915, who offered him the transmission of encrypted German messages via US diplomatic cable.

The Americans did not have the keys to the code, a situation in contravention of accepted practice for neutral nations. This route was also employed several times in January 1917 in the context of peace initiatives. It is explained in Hendrick [20, c. XII, p. 342] and more reliably in Lansing [30, p. 227], where we also find the dates for the two telegrams Nos. 157 and 158 to von Bernstorff. Usage of this route was not automatic: a telegram from von Bernstorff to Berlin on 10 January 1917 was at first refused but then sent anyway (FRUS [18, pp. 83, 87]).

The transmission time of telegrams even over the regular US diplomatic channels was quite long: Ambassador James Watson Gerard in Berlin sent a telegram to Lansing at 10 pm on 31 January. It was received at 8.15 am on 2 February, after over 40 hours of transit (FRUS [18, p. 37]).

The Germans thought that the Americans had probably informed the British about their courtesy; on page 180 of the Göppert file, Prinz Hatzfeld of the German embassy in Washington states to Göppert: *I do not think that the American government kept it as a secret from the English that they forwarded on and off telegrams for us. At least some journalists knew about it*. The British obviously knew about the US diplomatic channel, but there is no evidence that the US ever told them. And, the British kept their tapping of the US diplomatic cables a secret.

Swedish Roundabout

The Swedish government was officially neutral but with a pro-German inclination. They allowed the use of their own diplomatic traffic to the Germans for their transatlantic communications. These lines passed through the UK and were milked by the British, who could tell their origin, and protested in the summer of 1915 (Friedman and Mendelsohn [17, pp. 15–16]). The Swedes promised not to forward German messages to Washington.

They kept their promise literally, but now permitted the use of their communications with Buenos Aires in South America. The messages were given to the German diplomats there, who then forwarded them to their representations in Washington, Mexico, or elsewhere. These lines also passed through Great Britain, and Room 40 became aware of the traffic rather quickly. This time, they kept mum—reading those messages was deemed more important than protesting against illegal acts by a neutral power.

Radio Transmission

Beginning in 1906, the German Telefunken company had built a giant radio transmitter at Nauen, 30 km west of Berlin. It was used for broadcasting to the German colonies, to ships at sea, and to the German-owned station at Sayville on the south shore of Long Island, NY, which went into service in 1912. By Executive Order dated 5 September 1914, the US President prohibited unneutral radio messages from Sayville and German usage of the station, but from 20 April 1915 on, the US government allowed transmissions with Nauen. The US Navy Department took over the Sayville station on 9 July 1915, keeping the German operators in place. The radio traffic via Nauen is explained, with quotes from documents, in Friedman and Mendelsohn [17, pp. 13–15] and extensively in Howeth [22, c. XVIII, XIX]. The Atlantic Communication Co., an American subsidiary of Telefunken, owned and operated Sayville station.

The State Department informed von Bernstorff on 26 January 1915 that *radio messages in code or cipher are only permitted to be exchanged between diplomatic missions in this country and their respective Governments, and then only when copies of code or cipher used have been deposited with the Naval Officials in charge of the radio station through which the message is to be sent or received* (Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, RM 5/1746, page 5). Accordingly, the German operators had given to the US Navy Department censors two copies of the codebook used for this traffic.

Von Bernstorff [2, pp. 63–65] describes the events leading to the permission for encrypted wireless messages, with the codebook given to the US censors. On page 257 of the Göppert file, von Bernstorff writes that the US government has proposed to allow private companies the use of codes for names and monetary amounts, starting 15 January 1917. Termination of radio traffic is on page 308 of the Göppert file.

Von Bernstorff was not happy with the arrangement: *By its nature, this procedure presented only a provisional solution for us, and was unsuitable for carrying out negotiations with the American government.* In his 1920 memories [2, p. 153], he mentions how he sent steganographic messages hidden in the normal traffic of the *Wolff* and the *Transocean* news agencies.

The encrypted messages were carefully examined, and in some cases, were not forwarded because they were not clear. It is unlikely that the encrypted Zimmermann telegram, together with the long message No. 157, would have escaped this scrutiny. The German operators were ousted just after the break of diplomatic relations in February 1917, and Sayville turned over completely to the US Navy at the declaration of war. The station at West Sayville was north of the railroad tracks and west of Cherry Avenue. The Federal Aviation Administration used it until mid-1995. See www.telefunken.8k.com. Nauen is still in service; the *Deutsche Welle* broadcasts from its majestic Werkbund building constructed in 1919 by Hermann Muthesius.

A second transatlantic radio connection between Eilvese, 20 km northwest of Hannover, and Tuckerton, on Hickory Island NJ, north of Atlantic City, was also taken over by the US government, on 9 September 1914. It used a technology that was incompatible with the Nauen-Sayville transmissions.

In the literature, it is sometimes stated that Nauen communicated with Sayville and Tuckerton, and Eilvese is usually not mentioned; see for example Friedman and Mendelsohn [17, p. 13]. In fact, only Eilvese broadcast to Tuckerton. Eilvese station was demolished in 1931, and the one at Tuckerton in 1955. Radio traffic between these stations was stopped on 10 April 1917, at least for private telegrams.

U-Boat

This is a fourth hypothetical transmission option but was definitely not used. However, its mention in the telegram draft asks for an explanation.

The submarines' major purpose is, in general, to sink freighters, but the *Deutschland* was built to be a freighter herself. As a cargo submarine, she ran the Atlantic blockade with which the Royal Navy was trying to starve Germany, in contravention of international laws, which protected neutral shipping. The story of the German commercial submarines is expertly and comprehensively told in Heitmann [19].

On her second trip across the Atlantic, she docked on 2 November 1916 at New London CT (Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv RM 2/1611, pp. 34–38). She brought 750 tons of dyestuffs, chemicals, and medication against poliomyelitis, and the 0075 codebook for the German legation in Washington. A customs inspection concluded that she had no weapons or ammunition on board. The cipher material was shipped in one of the six sealed diplomatic pouches on board, which were exempt from inspection and taken directly to the German embassy by the special courier Franz Krapohl, who was first officer on board (Heitmann [19, pp. 252, 286]). Leaving on 17 November, she scored her first “hit” by accident, colliding at 2.29 am in a strong current with the tow ship *T. A. Scott Jr.*, which then sank, drowning five people. The U-boat's damage was efficiently repaired, and she sailed again on 21 November, arriving in Bremen on 10 December 1916, *after a fast trip*.

She was scheduled to depart again in January 1917, carrying the Zimmermann telegram on board. The marginal note at top left, lines 5 and 6, in Figure 1 instructs *By U-boat on the 15th of this month via Washington*, and indeed the note at bottom left says that *the document was removed for a U-boat on 13 January*. This was a few days after the decision to wage unrestricted submarine warfare, her trip was cancelled on 20 January, and she was drafted into active service on 19 February. The cipher bureau informed the foreign office on 24 February 1917 that the U-boat *Deutschland* had not sailed (Göppert file, page 6).

After being outfitted with guns and torpedoes at the Kaiserliche Werft Wilhelmshaven, she sortied on 23 May 1917, now as *U-cruiser U-155*, with Lieutenant Captain Karl Meusel as her skipper. She sank 19 vessels, none by accident, before her return on 5 September. Meusel's log book, RM 97/1123 at the Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, makes a fascinating read. The instructions to him are in RM 5/6429, pages 31ff.

German Diplomatic Codes

We now discuss the cryptographic tools available to the foreign office in early 1917. Hofrat Propp had been head of the Chiffrierbüro (=cipher bureau) since 1911. *Hofrat is privy councilor*, a medium-level position.

In 1912, he provided all diplomatic representations in the Americas with codebook 5950, printed (without page numbers) at a cost of 20 marks for each of the 600 copies, a total of over \$50,000 in 2005 US dollars. (US \$1 in 1913 was worth 4.20 German marks, and is about \$18.50 in 2005 according to the Consumer Price Index; see www.eh.net.) In 1917, it was known to be broken, and it played no role in the Zimmermann story.

Of the two that did, code 13040 consisted of about 11000 words, to which 3-, 4-, or 5-digit encryptions were assigned. This codebook had been used in the Americas since 1907. In the Göppert file, Propp writes on page 88: 13040 used in Washington,

Havana, Port-au-Prince, La Paz since 1912, at other (American) missions since 1907–1909; see also page 220.

No original editions of 13040 seem to have survived. At least, there are no copies of codes 13040 or 0075 in AA-PA (letter from AA-PA dated 20 October 2004) and no copy of telegrams Nos. 157 and 158 is in the US State Department archives [17, p. 25].

My description is based on a reconstruction of 13040 by Room 40 held by The National Archives (HW 3/176) in England, of which Peter Freeman kindly furnished a copy to me.

The 100 words per page were numbered from 00 to 99 in their alphabetical order. Four pages were printed on one sheet, and these sheets could be rearranged to vary the code; the encoding of a word consisted of the page number plus its number on the page. The shorter codewords served for numbers, dates, frequent phrases, and grammatical inflections. Common words like *Komma* or *Stop* were sprinkled on each page. Some pages were given two numbers either of which could be used, thus halving the frequencies of words on that page.

The alphabetical order appears even in the relatively few words of the Zimmermann telegram in Figure 4 (see Table 1). Unteutonic alphabetical levity seems to have flipped 14814/14936 and 22284/22295; indeed minor deviations from the usual order are plentiful, especially within a given page. The verb *einschränken* actually comes between *einladen* and *Einverständnis*. Frequent words like *stop* often occur out of sequence. A complete sorted list of numerical code values of the telegram and another message is given in Kahn [25].

A rather naïve superencipherment was available both for 5950 and 13040: a five-digit number like 74198 was inserted near the end of a message, and its first, third, and fifth digit, 718 in the example, were added (without carries) to the (numerical) cipher groups. This three-digit group was repeated as often as necessary, just as in a key addition or Vigenère cipher (pages 171 and 218 of the Göppert file). The resulting “new” codebook received the designations 26040 through 26048 (page 85 of the Göppert file). Just as the 13042 for 13040 in Figure 4, this illustrates the multiple naming of codes. The German cipher bureau had approved this method, but the embassy in Havana found the superencipherment too transparent.

Furthermore, the resulting numbers—raw or superenciphered 13040—were usually further modified using the commercial ABC code. This code, publicly available, provided a conversion from the numbers up to 88849 into five-letter artificial words. The purpose of this conversion was not secrecy but economy: the five-letter words counted as a unit for telegram pricing, while otherwise each digit of a numerical message was counted. Kühn says on page 173 of the Göppert file that the ABC encoding was used for *Verschleierungszwecke* (*superencipherment*); this cannot be a serious cryptographic view. Indeed, the cipher clerk Märkl gives only *Ersparnisrück-sichten* (*savings considerations*) as the reason.

The other major system used by the Germans was a 10,000-word codebook, which could be designated either as 0075 or as 7500. It was a two-part codebook, where ciphertext numbers were assigned randomly to cleartext words, so that one part, with cleartext in alphabetical order, was used for encryption and another part, with ciphertext in numerical order, for decryption. It had been used since 1915 in communications with posts in Holland and had been sent to Washington in November 1916 by the U-boat *Deutschland*, but not to Mexico. Various other

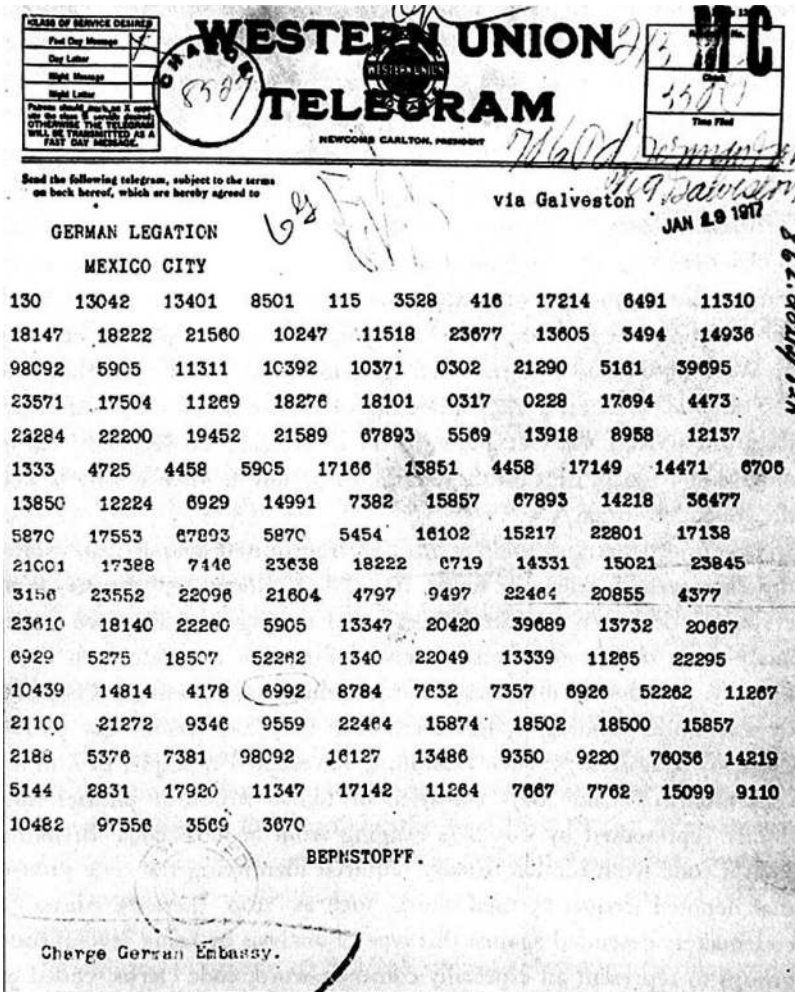


Figure 4. The Zimmermann telegram, as forwarded from Washington to Mexico.

posts in Europe had used it since mid-July 1916, and Washington was its only non-European destination (Göppert Report, page 215).

Such codebooks are harder to cryptanalyze than those with (sectional) order like 13040 because partial solutions do not provide alphabetical boundaries for the unknown words. The German cryptographers called such a codebook Lotteriechiffre

Table 1. Alphabetic Order in Zimmermann telegram, Figure 4

| | | | |
|-------|------------------------|-------|-------------------|
| 14814 | <i>einladen</i> | 22049 | <i>sich</i> |
| 14936 | <i>eingeschränkten</i> | 22096 | <i>Sie</i> |
| 14991 | <i>Einverständnis</i> | 22200 | <i>stop</i> |
| 15021 | <i>einzel</i> | 22260 | <i>Sobald</i> |
| 15099 | <i>Empfang</i> | 22284 | <i>sollte</i> |
| | | 22295 | <i>sofortiger</i> |

(lottery cipher) because of the random correspondence between words in cleartext and ciphertext.

The codewords in 0075 are four- or five-digit numbers. Sometimes a superencipherment was used, very similar to the one for 13040 described above. Its secret key consisted of seven digits which were added consecutively to the codegroups, restarting with the first key number after the last one. Mendelsohn [32] gives partial decipherments of two messages, both related to the Zimmermann affair, based on a reconstruction of just 6% of the 0075 codebook.

A fairly lax attitude towards physical security prevailed at the German embassy in Washington. The codebooks and messages (ciphertext and cleartext) were kept in a safe whose combination was known to twelve clerks and all the higher officials. It had been set to 7 and 24 in 1902 or earlier, and those secret numbers were still in vigor in 1917 (Göppert file, page 192).

The US cryptographers of the Signal Security Agency (MI-8) reviewed in 1945 the German codes (military and diplomatic) of World War I and graciously concluded on page 53 of their report, “in spite of [some] defects the German codes were distinctly better than those of other governments which MI-8 studied during the war [. . . They] were much better, it must be admitted, than the corresponding systems in use by the United States Army at the beginning of the war” [42].

4. From Pleß to Washington and Mexico City

This section first deals briefly with the situation leading to the telegram, and then with the transmission from Berlin to Washington and Mexico City. Substantial confusion exists in the literature as to the first leg, in particular concerning the possibility of the Swedish roundabout. The telegram logs from the German foreign office presented here put any such speculation to rest: the Zimmermann telegram went from Berlin to Washington only via US diplomatic lines.

The salient dates in the history of the Zimmermann telegram are given in Table 2. Its political background is somewhat convoluted. The upshot is that it was more

Table 2. The Zimmermann chronology in early 1917

| Date | Event |
|-------------|--|
| 9 January | Imperial decision for unrestricted submarine warfare |
| 13 January | Zimmermann signs message |
| 16 January | Telegram from Berlin to Washington in 0075 |
| 17 January | Room 40 partially deciphers the message |
| 19 January | Telegram from Washington to Mexico in 13040 |
| 31 January | Germany declares unrestricted U-boat warfare |
| 3 February | Wilson breaks diplomatic relations with Germany |
| 19 February | Room 40 receives 13040 message from Mexico |
| 22 February | Hall gives complete solution to Page |
| 24 February | Wilson receives the telegram |
| 1 March | Story published in US newspapers |
| 3 March | Zimmermann admits authorship |
| 6 April | US congress declares war on Germany |

likely intended for use in the political struggle between government and military in Germany rather than as a serious treaty proposal to Mexico.

Mexico was a natural partner for the diplomatically isolated Germans to address. As a general reference, Katz [28] explains in great detail the Mexican situation, in particular the rapprochement with Germany on pages 346–350.

On the one hand, the animosity between Mexico and the US manifested itself in a Mexican attack in March 1916 on civilians across the border and an ensuing punitive expedition under Colonel (later General) John J. Pershing, which was terminated unsuccessfully after a year [28, pp. 313–314, 350].

The marauding cavalry's behavior during its one-year rampage in Northern Mexico increased widespread *yanquifobia* in Mexico, "Poor Mexico, so far from God and so close to the United States", in the words of former president Porfirio Díaz [44, p. 263].

On the other hand, Mexicans had made proposals of joint undertakings in 1916 to the Germans, who were not interested at that time (Katz [28, pp. 330–333, 351]; Nassua [37]). Meyer [33, p. 80], mentions a group of Mexican exiles in San Diego TX with a plan to recover *Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Upper California*. However, the German foreign office was not sufficiently naïve to believe that the United States of Mexico could make war on the other United States successfully; see Zimmermann's speech on page 31.

A second part of the background was Germany's political isolation at the time. Japan had declared war in August 1914 and occupied German colonies in China and the Pacific. Nonetheless, the German government looked for Mexico's help as an intermediary to get into contact with Japan again.

The major part of the background is the political struggle between government and army command in Germany. In the course of the *Lusitania* crisis in mid-1915, the German military had eventually caved in and accepted restrictions on the use of their U-boats. But the bloody stalemate in the European trench war led the High Command to the conviction that only unrestricted submarine warfare would bring England to her knees. Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg opposed this plan resolutely. In turn, the influential top brass demanded his resignation. Von Bernstorff cautioned from Washington, painting a somber scenario amazingly close to what was actually to happen later. On 9 January 1917, the politically unsophisticated military—exercising a svengalian power based on their Eastern front victories early in the war—prevailed at a conference in the Imperial headquarters at Pleß in Upper Silesia, and the Kaiser signed the order for an all-out submarine war (Deutsche Nationalversammlung [8, II. Beilagen, Teil VII, No. 213, pp. 321–322], and von Müller [35, pp. 248–249]). In this atmosphere, von Kemptz had the brilliant idea that condensed into the infamous telegram.

In the long cipher message No. 157 to Washington of 856 groups (Göppert file, page 10), von Bethmann Hollweg explained on 16 January the German U-boat decision and instructed the ambassador to inform Wilson of it on 1 February. This was later changed to 31 January in Telegram No. 171 dated 26 January from Zimmermann to von Bernstorff; see Deutsche Nationalversammlung [8, p. 338], and Carnegie Endowment [6, II. Beilagen, Teil II, No. 236, pp. 1028–1029].

No. 158 was attached to it; it is the famous Zimmermann telegram. In his memoirs, von Bethmann Hollweg [4] discusses at length the German U-boat decision and his opposition to it, but does not even mention the Zimmermann telegram. It may well be that he did not know of it at the time of its dispatch. Katz writes, "There

is no evidence that [Zimmermann] consulted with Bethmann Hollweg before sending his proposal.” [28, p. 353].

The notes in the telegram on encryption are interesting, although in the end they were not executed. They instruct to send the message for von Eckardt from Berlin in 13040, and the one for von Bernstorff in 0075. This agrees perfectly with the availability of the codes in the two missions. In fact, we can even trace the process leading to this decision. At the top right in line 6 of Figure 1, the scribe has noted *In Postziffern* (*In transmission cipher*), someone else has instructed in parentheses *Mit geheimer Chiffre versenden* (*To be sent with secret cipher*), and in the center, crossreferenced to this note, another official has penned the question, *Hat Mexico geheime Chiffre vorliegen?* (*Is the secret cipher available in Mexico?*). This interchange leads to the instruction at left to send the missive in 13040. This order was given when a copy of the telegram was still thought to be shipped on the submarine *Deutschland* (Göppert Report, page 219).

The note 0075 to the left of the message to von Bernstorff, at the bottom of Figure 2, also agrees with the availability of the codes. However, the instructions became void when the planned U-boat trip was cancelled. The first message was, in fact, sent in 0075 to Washington, and the second one not at all.

Two marginal notes expand on the contents but were not sent with the telegram. The first one clarifies that *no guarantee* (for reconquering the three states) *is expressed*. The second one suggests that *California should be reserved for Japan*. That state had also been ceded to the US in the treaty ending the war with Mexico, and the remark indicates a discussion at the German foreign office whether it should throw in California as a bonus—it would not increase the cost.

California does not occur in the telegram as sent, but appears somewhat mysteriously in three places. Millis mentions California in his book *Road to War*; his book is today considered as revisionist and shunned by most historians [34, p. 407]. Friedman and Mendelsohn note his remark and ask, “Is it possible that the Germans were reserving California as bait for Japan?” Good guess!

Thomas Beaumont Hohler, a British diplomat in Mexico [17, p. 46], mentions the Zimmermann affair in his 1942 autobiography [21, p. 32]. It contains many factual errors, and Hohler adds California as a fourth state to be reconquered by the Mexicans.

The transmission of the telegram is described in the Göppert Report, page 210:

The instruction to the Imperial envoy in Mexico [...] was appended as No. 158 to the telegram No. 157 for the Imperial ambassador in Washington, which dealt with the submarine war, designated “top secret” and encrypted with the lottery cipher 0075 without superencipherment. At the beginning of telegram No. 157, the date “16 January” is encrypted; No. 158 contains no date. The ciphertext was transmitted to the American ambassador [in Berlin] with the request to telegraph it to the [US] State Department to be forwarded to the Imperial embassy in Washington. [...] The American ambassador received the dispatch from the foreign office on 16 January at 3 p.m. and immediately sent it on via the American legation in Copenhagen. Our Central Telegraph Office had sent it on by 7.50 p.m. The State Department forwarded it on 19 January to the Imperial embassy. Telegram No. 158 was encrypted on the same day with the code 13040 and sent by telegram to the Imperial legation in Mexico; the telegram arrived there on 19 January. On 5 February a

second instruction to the Imperial envoy in Mexico was sent from Berlin as telegram No. 11 via a different route. [...] This telegram likewise arrived correctly at the legation.

Telegram No. 157, dated 16 January 1917, is printed in *Deutsche Nationalversammlung* [8, II. Beilagen, Teil II, Nr. 57, pp. 45–47], and FRUS [18, pp. 97–102]. The former Imperial Central Telegraph Office at Französische Straße 33a-c in Berlin now serves as an elegant office building of Deutsche Telekom. Zimmermann's statement in the Reichstag in section 6 of this article, and the official record of *Deutsche Nationalversammlung* [8, II. Beilagen, Teil VIII, footnote to No. 235, p. 337], confirm transmission via the US State Department. No other route is stated. The sending date of 16 January is also in Hendrick [20, v. III, p. 336] and Friedman and Mendelsohn [17, pp. 30–31]. According to the Göppert Report, the telegram was received at the German embassy at Washington on 19 January; Lansing [30, p. 227], and Katz [28, p. 355] give 18 January. The forwarding date of 19 January is visible in Figure 4, and stated in von Bernstorff [2, pp. 358, 379–380].

The telegram from 5 February, two days after the rupture of diplomatic relations, reads:

Provided no treason of this secret to the United States is to be feared, your Excellency may already now broach the question of an alliance to the President [Carranza]. However, the definite conclusion of an alliance depends on the outbreak of war between Germany and the United States. The President might already now sound out Japan on his own initiative. Should the President decline for fear of subsequent American retaliation, you are empowered to offer a defensive alliance after conclusion of peace, provided Mexico succeeds in drawing Japan into the alliance.

We find the text in the Göppert file, pages 21–22 and 211; *Deutsche Nationalversammlung* [8, II. Beilagen, Teil VIII, No. 236, p. 338]; and TNA HW 7/8. Interestingly, the telegram as actually sent (Freeman [16, f. 2]) does not contain the *American* in *subsequent American retaliation*.

The manuscript draft of this message contains the annotations *Stockholm* and *13040*, and the Göppert Report says that it went on a route different from the Zimmermann telegram's. It was transmitted via Sweden and Argentina to Mexico, without passing through Washington, where the embassy was closing shop after the break of diplomatic relations on 3 February [30, p. 203].

The draft also contains a paragraph, struck out and not sent, instructing Eckardt to attempt to keep the South American ABC countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile) from any rash commitment to the US.

From the Göppert file, we learn details about the cipher procedure at the German embassy in Washington. They provide rare insights into the inner workings of a cipher bureau, whose day-to-day drudgery is typically veiled in dark secrecy (or too boring to remember).

On 19 January 1917, at the German embassy in Washington, a crowd of seven clerks was busily decrypting the 856-group telegram No. 157 and its shorter appendix No. 158, the Zimmermann telegram (Göppert file, page 128). They were Schafhausen (the head of the embassy cipher section, spelled Schaffhausen in some places), Bartram, Dammann, Gesemann, Gramms, Kunkel, and Märkl (Göppert file, page 154).

Then two people, one of them Richard Kunkel, encrypted No. 158 in 13040 for Mexico. They encoded the text in Figures 1 and 2, and added at the beginning *No. 130, 13042, foreign office telegraphs on 16 January: No. 1*. Here 130 is the Berlin to Washington number of the telegram, the 13042 is an alternative indicator for code 13040, and No. 1 designates the first Washington to Mexico telegram of the year. At the end, Zimmermann's signature is followed by *stop end-of-message*, and finally *Bernstorff* in clear-text. The telegram in Figure 4 was sent to Mexico via Western Union. It is in the National Archives at College Park, MD (NACP), Record Group 84 (records of the Department of State), 862.20212/82A [36] and reproduced in several publications.

Presumably because of time pressure, it was neither superenciphered nor converted into words and cost the staggering *charge* of US \$85.07 (in the circular stamp at top left), roughly equivalent to US \$1300 in 2005.

Interestingly, the German diplomats in Washington assumed that all their telegrams to Mexico were passed to the British. Josef Schmid, cashier at the German embassy in Washington, reported to Göppert in March 1917 (Göppert file, page 160):

We handed all our telegrams for Mexico to the Western Union Telegraph Company. They collaborated closely with the Mexican Telegraph Company, a line which was almost completely in English hands.

Thus, the Germans must have assumed that each telegram for Mexico was handed over to the English. This fear is not borne out by the special effort, described in Section 5, needed to acquire the Western Union version of the telegram.

One controversial issue has been the transmission Berlin–Washington of the Zimmermann telegram. There is no serious doubt that it went via the US diplomatic channel in 0075, and that it did not go by U-boat. However, there are numerous suggestions in the literature that it was transmitted via the Swedish roundabout and/or via wireless, and encoded in 13040. Radio transmission can be ruled out according to the description in Section 2; encrypted messages were only allowed in a code that had been provided to the US censors. Below, I present documents furnished by the German foreign office proving that also the Swedish suggestion is unfounded.

An early piece of (presumably involuntary) misinformation is a letter by the US diplomat, Edward Bell, who acted as liaison between the US embassy in London and Room 40. He wrote from Tokyo on 13 July 1921 to W. L. Hurley at the US State Department. Katz cites extensively from Bell's letter [28, p. 358]; Kahn [27] prints the letter in full and has located this at the National Archives in Washington, Record Group 59, Entry 346, office of the Counsellor, Leland Harrison's General Correspondence, Box 7, Folder Page-Hendrick. Bell states that the telegram went on the Swedish roundabout:

Z. [Zimmermann] sent the telegram through the Swedes via Stockholm over the London cable to the Swede at B.A. [Buenos Aires] who turned it over to Luxburg [Graf Karl Ludwig von Luxburg, chargé d'affaires at the German embassy there] for transmission to Bernstorff for Eckhardt [sic] in Mexico. In the preceding [sic] summer the Bosh [Germans] had sent out a new table for the cipher code to B. in Washington by the submarine DEUTSCHLAND. It hadn't been used much and Blinker's [Admiral Hall, director of Room 40] lads had been able to do little with

it so when this message went through London in this new code it yielded very little to their efforts. Luxburg repeated it in the same code to B. As however Eckhardt did not have the new table B. had to decode and recode it to him in the old book. Blinker had a plant in the telegraph office in Mexico who sent back copies of all cipher messages which passed through for Eckhardt, as opportunity offered. This message was sent in January and a copy of the cipher text, in the form in which B. sent it to Eckhardt, reached Blinker towards the end of February. He was able to uncork it, as it was in the old code, and this not only gave him the message itself but also, by comparison with the text that went through London, a start on the new code. It was a kind of Rosetta Stone.

In similar words, Bell had reported already on 17 September 1917 that the telegram went in 7500 via Sweden and Argentina to Washington [17, p. 18].

He received his information from the British, presumably from Hall who is widely recognized as a genius who turned the Zimmermann telegram into a huge British success. However, his statements during the war were colored by the need to protect the secret of Room 40, and his postwar writing enjoyed only limited credibility, according to the British cryptographer Nigel de Grey, “Many of the statements made by Admiral Hall are incorrect. Some were I think wilfully so—others were due to faulty memory, a thing which never prevented him in after life from making categorical statements, if it suited him, without checking the evidence” [27, p. 156].

Hendrick writes that the telegram was sent by radio, the Swedish route, and US cable [20, XII]. The later works of Ewing [12, pp. 204–205], Tuchman [46, p. 146], and Beesly [1, p. 214], say the same, as did Ewing in his 1927 lecture [24, p. 86]. Friedman and Mendelsohn [17, p. 11], find that “there is reason to doubt [. . .] that the Zimmermann telegram was transmitted by radio from Nauen to Sayville”. Kahn [26, p. 1025, note to page 284], received a letter from the German foreign office giving “only the American route for the message, which may mean that the Zimmermann telegram did not go by the Swedish roundabout. Opposing this is the fact that important messages between Washington and Berlin were frequently transmitted by several routes to ensure their reception.” Katz [28, p. 355] mentions the US diplomatic cable and Swedish routes, and vaguely the radio. Stevenson [43, p. 257] states three transmission routes: radio, Sweden, and US cable, that all three were intercepted by the British, and that they had a 13040 codebook, captured in 1915 from a German agent in Persia. For the latter story, see Edmonds [11] and Beesly [1, p. 131].

De Grey himself wrote that the London drop copy was in 13040 and hard to break [27, pp. 153–154]. An affidavit by Hall, dated 28 December 1926, includes a message from Berlin to Washington of 26 January 1915 in code 13040 and solved by the British. It is Claimants’ Exhibit 320 in the report of the German-American Mixed Claims Commission, and printed as Appendix A in Friedman and Mendelsohn [17]. Thus, it looks like Room 40 had broken (parts of) 13040 as early as 1915, in contradiction to de Grey’s statement.

Nickles [38, n. 25, p. 240] cites the works of Katz and Kahn but does not accept Bell’s word as evidence, “I have found no evidence that the telegram traveled via the Swedish route, although many historians have claimed that it did. [. . .] I believe the claim probably testifies to the effectiveness of British misinformation. [. . .] Many historians have also repeated the claim of Hendrick and Tuchman [. . .] that the message went out on wireless. This is almost certainly incorrect.”

The careful telegram logs entitled *Geheime Ausgänge 1917* (Secret telegrams dispatched 1917) at the German foreign office put any such Swedish speculation to rest. It is usually hard to prove that a certain message was not sent, but we are in luck here. There were separate logs for the regular and the secret telegrams to each legation abroad. The *secret* telegram entries (see Table 3) are on the following pages: Washington: page 25, Mexico: page 113, Stockholm: pages 145 and 146.

Table 3. Excerpts consisting of contiguous entries that contain the *secret* items relevant to our story, and others

| Telegram no. | Order no. | Date | | A. no. |
|------------------------------|-----------|------|---|--------------------|
| <i>Washington</i> | | | | |
| Order was not sent see files | A10 | 12/1 | Instruction for the envoy in Mexico concerning a treaty with Mexico and possibly Japan in case of war with America | 162 |
| 156 | | 15/1 | Repetition of telegram 141: weapons for Ireland | 4745 |
| 157 | | 16/1 | Instruction concerning intensified submarine war | 216 |
| 158 | | ” | To be forwarded to Mexico for the telegram thence [?] No. 1 | 162 ^{II} |
| <i>Mexico</i> | | | | |
| Order was not sent see files | A2 | 13/1 | Intention to start intensified submarine war on 1 February. In case of war with America we propose treaty with Mexico and possibly Japan | 162 |
| 1 | | 16/1 | the same | 162 ^{II} |
| 3 | | 31/1 | via Stockholm 129: Declaration [?] to England, France, and Italy. —Inform Mexican government and legations of Guatemala and Panama | 447 |
| 11 | | 5/2 | Envoy should discuss the question of a treaty with the President already now. Definitive conclusion dependent on outbreak of war between America and Germany. Possibly defensive treaty, provided Japan joins | 162 ^{III} |
| <i>Stockholm</i> | | | | |
| 50 | | 15/1 | Tel. 16 to Buenos Aires with Tel. 156 | 4745 |
| 58 | | 17/1 | Tel. 20 to Buenos Aires with Tel. 160 to Washington | 18 |
| 66 | | 18/1 | Tel. 22 to Buenos Aires with Tel. 162 to Washington | 227 |
| ⋮ | | ⋮ | ⋮ | |
| 170 | | 5/2 | Tel. 11 to Mexico | 162 ^{III} |

I now explain the entries in Table 3. The first column gives the telegram number from Berlin to the destination. The missing numbers presumably correspond to non-secret telegrams. A few of the more important telegrams had a special order (Erlaß) number, which was noted in the second column. After the date column comes a useful précis of the telegram's content. The last column contains the file number (Akten No.).

As the first item of interest for our story, we see Erlaß Mexico A2 (Figure 1 and the top half of Figure 2) and Erlaß Washington A10 (Figure 3 and bottom half of Figure 2) already entered on 13 and 12 January, respectively. Both refer to file No. 162, and were not sent. However, on 16 January, both 157 and 158 were sent to Washington, the latter containing telegram Mexico No. 1 related to file 162^{II}. This is the Zimmermann telegram, which was thus sent directly to Washington and forwarded to Mexico. The generous help of the US diplomatic service is not indicated.

Stockholm is not mentioned in this connection, but does occur in the transmission of the telegram from 5 February (see page 21), which urged von Eckardt to approach Carranza right away. Namely, this was sent as telegram Stockholm 170 on 5 February, referring to file No. 162^{III} and containing Telegram 11 to Mexico. The corresponding entry Mexico No. 11 describes the contents in three sentences.

From the telegram logs, we can conclude that the Swedish roundabout was used at times, for example for Mexico No. 11, but not for the Zimmermann telegram.

At the German embassy in Washington, files were burnt before the unrestricted U-boat warfare was announced to Lansing, since a break of diplomatic relations was expected. Postal Secretary Bartram filed a report to Göppert after his return back home:

I took care of the incineration of the secret A files [a section of the diplomatic files] and stood by the fire until the papers were completely burnt. I burned the Zimmermann telegram in the filing office with a match, the ash fell into an empty wastebasket, it was in the morning. Later on, more paper was thrown into the basket, so that the ashes surely desintegrated and the writing was certainly not readable any more.

The embassy employees had strict instructions not to discuss the contents of these two sensational telegrams. But it seems that almost everybody knew about them. According to the Göppert file, page 172, as an exception the supernumerary Paul Kühn only heard about the Zimmermann telegram on leaving the US.

Von Eckardt presented the offer of the Zimmermann telegram to the Mexican Foreign Minister Cándido Aguilar Vargas on 20 February 1917. After some deliberation and the US declaration of war against Germany, President Carranza rejected it on 14 April.

5. London and Washington

This section discusses the British cryptanalytic solution of the telegram, and the astute political usage made of it. The facts, as we know them now, are that Nigel de Grey and another cryptanalyst partially solved the 0075 message within hours of interception. The 13040 version was obtained from Mexico about a month later, immediately deciphered, and passed to the US government.

At the end of this section, we present three statements by de Grey, the biographer of one of the cryptanalysts, and Hohler, which contradict either the known facts or each other.

James Alfred Ewing, director of naval education, founded Room 40, the cryptanalytic unit of the British Navy, at the outbreak of war in August 1914. In November, it was integrated into the Division of Naval Intelligence, under Captain William Reginald *Blinker* Hall who later became Admiral and Sir Reginald. Black Chambers have a long tradition of being family affairs... and Hall's father had been the first director of the Intelligence Division of the British Admiralty [23, p. 2].

The telegram left Berlin at 7.50 pm on 16 January. The intercept—a *drop copy* in Room 40 jargon—was given to the two cryptographers Dillwyn Knox and Nigel de Grey. The latter handed the first partial decipherment to Hall around 10.30 am on 17 January. The cleartext words *Texas*, *New Mexico*, *Arizona* could not yet be solved by Room 40, and so the three states did not appear. In the 13040 version of Figure 4, Arizona is encrypted by four groups AR-IZ-ON-A.

The dates of initial and complete cryptanalysis are in James [23, pp. 136, 141]. Freeman [16, f. 4] shows de Grey's handwritten partial solution with the code designation 7500. Jones quotes from Ewing's 1927 talk, "The Zimmermann message was sent in a difficult cipher of which one of my staff, Mr Nigel de Grey, had made a special study. Though the first version was imperfect, the general sense was clear enough to make him instantly appreciate its immense political importance. Later he succeeded in making out the full text." [24, p. 87].

The US State Department files contain several message of von Bernstorff to Berlin, from November 1916 to January 1917. These are all in code 0075, and Friedman and Mendelsohn infer correctly that, "since the Bernstorff messages just mentioned were sent in Code 7500, the probabilities are very high that telegrams Nos. 157 and 158 were also in Code 7500. But the Zimmermann telegram as given to Ambassador Page by the British was the decoded version of a message not in Code 7500 but in Code 13040." [17, p. 25].

Right away, it was clear to everybody that the telegram was a bombshell that could serve to draw the US into the war—on the Entente side, of course. Besides completion of the decipherment, three problems had to be addressed:

- how to prove authenticity of the telegram;
- how to prove correctness of the solution; and
- how to safeguard the secret of Room 40.

Serendipitously, the British embassy in Mexico City had a source inside the local telegraph office. Thomas Hohler, Chargé d'Affaires from December 1910 to September 1916, had gained this access, and writes bashfully in his autobiography, "I half thought of bribing the operators in the telegraph office, but hesitated" [21, p. 223].

Edward Thurstan had arrived in July 1914 to replace the Consul-General Stringer at the British legation in Mexico City. As Hohler's successor in 1916, he continued to tap this source, and Hall asked Thurstan to obtain copies of all recent telegrams to the local German mission. In Hall's biography by James [23, pp. 133–135, 140–141], Hohler and Thurstan are just agents H and T—originally to protect their identities while they were still on active duty. See also Kahn [26, p. 289] and Tuchman [46, pp. 102, 157–158], where it is (incorrectly) stated that it was Agent H who procured the telegram.

De Grey explains the cloak-and-dagger action:

Although we had the 13040 version and knew Eckhardt had no 7500 book, without disclosing our drop copy source, we could not produce

it. Nor could we prove that the telegram had actually been delivered in Mexico to the German Legation and had not been faked in London. The only thing therefore was to steal a copy in Mexico City in the form delivered to the German Legation. We had two chances (a) the cable copy (b) the copy sent from Washington by Bernstorff which we banked on being also in 13040. Hence the delay till the end of February. How we succeeded in stealing the copy I never knew but money goes a long way in Mexico and steal it we did [27, p. 155].

Presumably (a) means the copy of (b) kept at the Mexican telegraph office. Not everybody has the grandeur to pay for what they steal.

It is not known whether Room 40 made any progress with the solution of the 0075 version to Washington over the first partial version on 17 January. But they were further ahead with 13040, and the Western Union version was easily *uncorked* [27, p. 149].

No German copies of the codebooks seem to have survived, but The National Archives of the United Kingdom keep two copies of the Room 40 solution of 13040. The page and item numbers are typed (sometimes with hand-written additions) and the cleartext is pencilled in. Roughly 40% of the groups have been solved. Most of the entries match the solution of the Western Union telegram, sometimes with minor variations of the grammatical form (verb/noun, singular/plural). Verbs or participles and corresponding nouns often follow each other: 14990 = *einverstanden* = *agreed* (with a question mark) and 14991 = *Einverständnis* = *agreement* (on line 7 of the text in Figure 4).

However, there are two types of inconsistencies between the book and the Zimmermann telegram solution. One is that 14964 = *Einschränkung* = *restriction* is in the book, and by the example above, it is reasonable to assume that 14963 is *einschränken/eingeschränkt* = *to restrict/restricted*. But instead the overworked cipher clerk in Washington, maybe Richard Kunkel, wrote the erroneous 14936 = *einzahlen* = *to pay into an account* at the end of line 2. Such a simple transposition did not throw de Grey off the scent.

The other anomaly is that the Room 40 book does not contain four of the groups that were correctly deciphered in the Zimmermann telegram (see Table 4). For example, the second line in Table 4 means that 9497 is the 6th group on line 10 of the coded text in Figure 4, and that the two closest entries in the codebook are 9495 and 9502. We observe that *Dezember* is slightly out of alphabetical order. Narrating his almost-failed deciphering demonstration for Bell (see page 28),

Table 4. Missing groups from the Room 40 book

| Line/group | Not in Room 40 book | In Room 40 book |
|------------|--|--|
| 2/4 | 10247 = <i>beabsichtigen</i> = <i>intend</i> | 10248 = <i>beabsichtigen</i> |
| 10/6 | 9497 = <i>dem</i> = <i>to the</i> | 9495 = <i>Dezember</i> 9502 = <i>Depot</i> = <i>store</i> |
| 12/2 | 5275 = <i>Anregung</i> = <i>suggestion</i> | 5276 = <i>angeregt</i> = <i>suggested</i> |
| 16/1 | 5144 = <i>wenigen</i> = <i>few</i> | 5143 = <i>wenig</i> = <i>little, few</i> 5145 = <i>weniger</i> = <i>less, fewer</i> |

de Grey admits *I had not written up my book*. The 13040 book from Room 40 bears no date; if it was completed after the Zimmermann solution, it would exhibit an unexpected sloppiness in the record-keeping of such a successful operation—not writing up the book.

Thurstan may have paid for it, or *stole it he did*—in any case, Hall had the Zimmermann telegram as received in Mexico City in his hands on 19 February. The clever move had paid off handsomely.

Now it was time for a series of subtle diplomatic manoeuvres. How to hand this god-sent message to the US government without raising suspicion about its authenticity? There was a sense of urgency. At the German announcement of unrestricted U-boat attacks, President Wilson had broken off diplomatic relations and sent ambassador von Bernstorff packing. But, he kept stalling on the declaration of war that the Entente hoped for.

Finally, on 22 February 1917, Hall gave the telegram and its decipherment, completed on 19 February, to Page, the US ambassador in London. Hall recruited the British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour for an official act of presenting the document to Page, the next day. He had been First Lord and Prime Minister in his long career, and was the most respected British politician at this time. President Wilson had the message in his hands on 24 February. Page's message to Lansing on 24 February is reprinted in Hendrick [20, pp. 332–333] and FRUS [18, pp. 147–148].

Kahn writes that the Berlin to Washington message was found in the US State Department files [26, p. 293]; Friedman and Mendelsohn [17, p. 25], did not find a record in those archives, and none is known today. Hendrick [20, p. 343], Lansing [30, p. 228], and Katz [28, p. 360], all say that the cipher message was obtained at the Washington cable office.

Indignation ran high in the White House at this brazen abuse of American generosity. On 27 February, they obtained from Western Union a copy of the Washington to Mexico message, shown in Figure 4 [30, pp. 226–232]. Lansing gave the story to Edwin Milton Hood of the Associated Press, the dean of the corps of Washington correspondents. It hit the newspaper headlines on 1 March. A wave of anger swept through the nation, as even the South-West and West realized that they might be involved in the war. But some skeptics still thought this might all be a British ruse. On 1 March, Lansing cabled to Page in London *the original message which we secured from the telegraph office in Washington*, and de Grey deciphered it at the Admiralty under the eyes of Bell from the US embassy. Strangely, this almost ended in disaster. De Grey had brought an incomplete version of the codebook, and had to extemporize many codewords—which he knew by heart and, luckily for him, Bell did not ask to check in the codebook.

Conjurer's magic in cryptography. It was more than enough to convince Wilson.

Hendrick [20, p. 345] and FRUS [18, p. 158], contain Page's report from 2 March, "Bell took the ciphertext [...] to the Admiralty and there, himself, deciphered it from the German code which is in the Admiralty's possession." But it was de Grey who deciphered it.

In a note composed 31 October 1945 and published by Kahn, de Grey wrote:

The version of the telegram upon which we worked was the version in 13040, which reached us from the Cable office in transit [...] we had been at work some time on 13040. Only one person worked on it for many months then two and later three. It was a long code, our experience of

book building was at its beginnings and there were many gaps unfilled. [...] We could at once read enough for Knox [a cryptographer at Room 40] to see that the telegram was important. Together he and I worked solidly all the morning upon it. [...] Work [...] was slow and laborious. [...] The version that went through Bernstorff's office was in 7500 so far as I recollect [27, pp. 153–154].

The further text of de Grey's note makes it clear that the 13040 version is definitely not the copy obtained by the British in Mexico sometime later, also in 13040. But de Grey's memory has failed him here: the first version in Room 40 was encrypted in 0075.

Alfred Dillwyn (Dilly) Knox, a classical scholar, had been in Room 40 since the beginning of 1915, and worked on German codes again at Bletchley Park, one war later. His biography by Fitzgerald contradicts de Grey's memory, "For the Zimmermann solution Dilly felt professional admiration, but also some professional jealousy. 'Can't we buy something from the post office?' became his plaintive murmur in all kinds of situations, even quite inappropriate ones, as for instance when things were left behind at a picnic. He had no such good fortune, in 1917, with his own assignment. He had been detailed to work exclusively on the special flag-code" [15, p. 144].

In a speech given in 1927, Ewing gives all credit to de Grey [24, p. 87]. James [23, p. 136], states that the Reverend William Montgomery had been working with de Grey on the cryptanalysis, and this has been taken up in the literature. Now, who was de Grey's collaborator, Knox or Montgomery? It requires more information than what is presently available to me to decide this.

Hohler [21, pp. 224–226], remembers how he sent an "exceptionally long message" in German code by "a trusty man with the document sewn in his waistcoat" to London, where it was rapidly deciphered and turned out to be the Zimmermann telegram. He also says that he was recalled from his Mexican assignment to the UK in September 1916—about four months before the Zimmermann affair! These detailed memories of events that never happened show the dangers of trusting such autobiographies.

6. Berlin

De Grey's magic cryptanalysis in front of Bell might not have been enough for a suspicious outsider. However, Zimmermann obliged again and came to rescue. An official German press communiqué appeared on 3 March 1917 in the newspapers. It was distributed by the official news agency *Wolff's Telegraphisches Büro* (*W.T.B.*) as *Nichtamtlich* (*non official*, see the Göppert file, page 28), and printed in the morning editions of most German newspapers on 3 March 1917 as *Eine amtliche deutsche Mitteilung*. Examples include: *Berliner Tageblatt*, morning edition, page 4; *Berliner Neueste Nachrichten*; *Berliner Morgenpost*; *Vorwärts*, page 1. According to Tuchman [46, p. 183], and Beesly [1, p. 223], Zimmermann also gave a press conference on 3 March; Tuchman gives precise details but no source. I could not find a mention in contemporary records. The German Bundesarchiv has no record of such a press conference (e-mail dated 23 April 2005). The press communiqué reads:

A possible German alliance proposal to Mexico.

An official German communiqué. Berlin, 2 March 1917.

The American press has printed information about instructions from the foreign office to the German minister in Mexico in case that Germany should not succeed in keeping the United States neutral after declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare. These articles are based on the following facts:

After the decision to start unrestricted submarine warfare on 1 February of this year and considering the previous attitude of the American government, the possibility of a conflict with the United States had to be considered. The facts proved correctness of this assessment, for soon after the announcement of our restricted area declaration the American government broke diplomatic relations with Germany and encouraged the other neutral powers to join this action.

In expectation of this possibility it was not only the right but even the duty of the Imperial government to make provisions for the case of a warlike conflict with the United States of America in order to neutralize the entry of a further enemy as far as possible. Therefore the Imperial envoy in Mexico was instructed in the middle of January, for the case of the United States declaring war on us, to propose an alliance to the Mexican government and to arrange all details. This instruction furthermore obliged the envoy explicitly to not take any steps towards the Mexican government until he was certain that the American declaration of war had been pronounced.

It is not known in which manner the American government learned of this instruction which had been sent to Mexico by secret communication; but it seems that the treason—which seems to be the case here—was committed on American territory.

Zimmermann's admission induced even the normally docile Parliament to a debate. The Haushaltsausschuß des Reichstags (Budget Committee of Parliament) had constituted itself on 10 March 1915 and was later called (unofficially) the Hauptausschuß (Principal Committee). It was the most powerful entity of a fairly powerless parliament. Twenty-eight leading members from all parties sat in it, and many of its sessions were confidential. The press reported summarily about its findings, but the discussions presented there were kept secret. On 5 March 1917 this committee met—secret matters were not discussed in full session—and the Social Democrat member Dr. Eduard David gave short shrift to the foreign ministry:

Concerning the contents of the telegram, the speaker [Dr. David] stressed that one cannot help but wonder how we can essentially offer parts of the United States to Mexico. This proposal suggests a bizarre assessment of the forces involved. Nobody familiar with the situation would seriously believe that Mexico would be able, given its military strength, to wage a war against America with sufficient success to occupy parts of its territory for any length of time. Such an offer could not be taken seriously by the relevant people in Mexico.

In his reply, Zimmermann admits:

I share the opinion that the Mexicans are unable to wage war successfully against the United States and conquer provinces. My intention was to convince Carranza to start marching as soon as possible. [...] It was important to me to avoid exposing our faithful field-gray uniforms to new enemies, and to provide employment against Mexico for the American soldiers of fortune who might otherwise go to Europe. That was the reason why I pointed out precisely these provinces so that the Mexicans immediately invade American territory and thus oblige the Americans to send their troupes there and keep them away from us. [...] In this war, moral has been filed away. [...] Of course, Mexico has no weapons in the modern sense, but the irregular gangs [struck out: robbergangs] are sufficiently supplied with weapons to stir up discomfort and unrest in the border states of America.

The member Dr. Oskar Cohn points out that Zimmermann “has played a brilliant argument into Wilson’s hands to rally the American people in unison around him.”

Zimmermann explains the arrangement which allowed encrypted German diplomatic traffic on US State Department lines:

My instruction [the Zimmermann telegram] went out by telegraph, namely with the assistance of the American ambassador here. The State Department had granted their ambassador the right to transmit certain telegrams of ours over there, and on the other hand, our ambassador in Washington had the right to transmit certain telegrams to us via the State Department. Allegedly this applied to telegrams that were directed at general efforts for peace. I attached the telegram under discussion to such a telegram. It goes without saying that I used a cipher that was absolutely secret and which the American ambassador here certainly did not know; I have no doubt about this. The matter arrived in Washington on time. How the matter was then betrayed is unknown to me.

Quite some chutzpah, sending a war-mongering telegram over a line that the Americans generously provided for peace efforts. And then good luck for the British cryptanalysts. In an earlier debate, Zimmermann had pointed out, “The President actually has enormous power in America. As they say in England: wright or wrong my country, so they say in America: wright or wrong my president. The man can commit stupidities as he likes, the nation will always stand behind the president. I wish it were like this in this country. (Great amusement.) Of course, this is not to be taken literally, because thank God our government does not commit stupidities. (Amusement.)” The “wright or wrong” is found literally in this official document and illustrates how little the Germans knew their enemies.

The debate in the Principal Committee as reported above is from the official typescript minutes titled *Akten über die Protokolle des Reichshaushalts-Ausschusses vom 6. Januar 1917 bis 5. März 1917*, Band 112, Bundesarchiv, Berlin, no. 1307, pages 301 and 489–541. Zimmermann had briefly commented on the press reports concerning his telegram in a session on 3 March, and most of the meeting on 5 March

was devoted to the subject. The published edition by Schiffers et al. [40, vol. 3, pp. 1149–1155] presents a digest of the discussions, smoothing away the human element and entertainment factor of the meetings.

David was a member of the Reichstag from June 1903 to November 1918 for the SPD (Socialdemocratic Party of Germany) and again 1920 to December 1930, representing its right wing, and he was President of the National Assembly in 1919/1920 (which instituted the democratic constitution of the Weimar Republic). In his war diary [7], the session of the Hauptausschuß is worth just three lines, which translate as, “I treated Zimmermann with indulgence—triumph of feudal diplomacy—unpleasant situation. I am very pessimistic about the future.”

Cohn was a member from January 1912 to November 1918, first for the SPD, then for the USPD (Independent Socialdemocratic Party of Germany).

The public consternation in Germany at Zimmermann’s diplomatic blunder prompted the foreign office to investigate the affair. They put Dr. Otto Moritz Robert Göppert at the head of this inquiry on 17 March (page 70 of the Göppert file). He had studied law in Lausanne, Tübingen, and Berlin. After his doctoral degree in 1893 at the age of 21, he did a year of voluntary military service, and entered the foreign office in 1899. He was posted in St. Petersburg, Baku, Zürich, and Constantinople (now Istanbul), and returned to Berlin in February 1917. Soon after, he was charged with the investigation concluded by his 27-page report, now part of a 281-page file containing supplementary documents, among them statements by the staff of the Washington embassy. It was submitted on 4 April 1917. After the war, he held office in various committees dealing with the contentious issues of reparations and land borders, including the German peace delegation in Paris. He retired in 1937.

Many details about transmission and encryption in the present article are taken from this document. Biographical details about Göppert appear in Keipert and Grupp [29]. The AA-PA has a box with Göppert’s papers: Rep. IV, Personalia, Nr. 141. Beesly [1, p. 233] has the (incorrect) date of 12 March for Göppert’s submission of his report, and places him at the head of the diplomatic cipher bureau since 1911, while actually Propp held that position (see page 15).

Berlin knew that the Zimmermann telegram would go from Washington to Mexico in code 13040. Good practice would have forbidden to send it in code 0075 from Berlin to Washington. A further consideration is that the telegram had been transmitted in code, and its contents (though not the literal cleartext) published in the American newspapers. A cautious cipher bureau would have assumed that the encrypted version might also be known to the enemy cryptanalysts and inferred that the code was insecure after the publication—in fact, it was Room 40’s *Rosetta stone* into 0075 (Bell in Kahn [27, p. 149]).

However, the German foreign office considered code 0075 secure as late as February 1918. These facts paint a rather sorry picture of Imperial cryptography—certainly, the Emperor’s clothes were transparent to the British. Of course, the lack of secure communications would have made the worldwide distribution of a new codebook infeasible. The situation would rather have required long-term anticipation of this scenario—matching the British preparedness as evidenced in the *Telconia* action. Berlin instructed von Eckardt on 23 March 1917 to discontinue the use of 13040 because it was considered compromised [28, p. 614, fn. 115].

The Göppert Report considers the possibility that the Americans might have possessed either code 0075 or 13040 and provides fairly convincing circumstantial

evidence against it. But it does not ask the question whether the British might have intercepted and deciphered the telegram. As throughout this somber period of Germany, von Bernstorff is one of the few diplomats with a clear mind. On his return to Europe, he landed at Copenhagen and gave an interview to the *National Tidende*, “In what way the American Government gained possession of these instructions I do not know: I can only assume that somehow or other the English or American secret police obtained knowledge of the key whereby the message was coded.” The reasoned opinion of von Bernstorff was not popular in German government circles. (The *National Tidende* excerpt from the *Daily Graphic* of 15 March 1917 is on page 167 of the Göppert file.)

The fact that the telegram had fallen prey to the cryptanalytic lions at Room 40 was kept under wraps for a few years. In Strother [45, p. 153], the reader is enticed by the remark that, “the story of the Zimmermann note cannot yet be told.” Hall’s involvement was not made public until 1956, when James’ [23] book appeared. In 1932, he wrote an account of his work in Room 40, but the British Admiralty did not permit its publication. Hall’s papers are kept at Churchill College, Cambridge University, Archive Centre, Hall papers, HALL 3/6. Hendrick’s [20] biography of Page contains the first published mention of Room 40’s role in the Zimmermann affair. Praise for Hall by Page, Wilson, and House is in Hendrick [20, p. 360–364].

Ewing, Principal of the University of Edinburgh from 1917 to 1929 and the founder of Room 40, gave a lecture on *Some Special War Work in Room 40* on 13 December 1927 at the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution, which *disturbed the serenity* of Admiralty circles so much that they tried to prohibit comments from former members of Room 40. His lecture is described in Ewing [12, p. 245–246]; see Jones [24], and Ewing [13, 14] for the full text.

President Wilson had won his election on 7 November 1916 with the slogan “He kept us out of war”. He broke off diplomatic relations after Germany’s declaration of unrestricted U-boat warfare, but still did not declare war. One can only speculate how much longer the US would have hesitated without the Zimmermann telegram. De Grey writes that “it gave Wilson his big stick for the West and South West, and America came into the war months earlier than she would otherwise have done” [27, p. 156].

A recent study by Boghardt [5] finds *that the sensation of the Zimmermann telegram quickly dissipated*: it figured in the headlines for merely two or three days, and after a week was hardly discussed at all. Beesley suggests that the mere thought of US support kept the Allied spirit afloat:

Everyone, British, French and Germans alike, had known since April 1917 that the Yanks *were* coming. The dark days of the German March offensive in 1918 would have been even darker without that knowledge. What would have happened if there had not then been a single US soldier in France? Would the line have held? Would a compromise peace, if not an abject surrender have been made? That such things did not happen is why the disclosure of the Zimmermann telegram can truly be said to have been the greatest Intelligence coup in history, and why Blinker Hall’s name is never likely to be forgotten [1, p. 224].

The rest is history. The massive deployment of American troops and arms, effective in 1918 after a year of armament, helped to push the weakened German military over, enfeebled by a starved economy and disillusioned population.

The Zimmermann telegram has always played a major role in the American historiography of the First World War, and a very minor one in the German view.

The basic difference is that on one side it is regarded as an evil and immoral plot, and on the other side as a legitimate if stupid diplomatic exercise in times of war. The German diplomats felt a responsibility to procure partners wherever possible in case of the US entering the war. However, the subtle point that the envoy in Mexico was carefully instructed to act only after the US gave up its neutrality was overlooked by the infuriated readers of American newspapers. Inexact translations of the central phrase have contributed to the rift; the noncommittal *Einverständnis unsererseits, daß Mexico . . . zurückeroberet = agreement (or consent) on our part for Mexico to reconquer . . .* has usually become the exhortation of an *understanding* (Hendrick [20, p. 333]; FRUS [18, p. 147]; Friedman and Mendelsohn [17, p. 1]; Ewing [12, p. 205]; Tuchman [46, p. 146, 202], and also in her *Zimmermann* article in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1973 edition; and Kahn [26, p. 292] or even *undertaking* [23, p. 141] *that Mexico is to reconquer . . .* The Zimmermann Telegram page at the website www.nationalarchives.gov.uk of The National Archives of the UK takes this further by translating on its page 2 that Mexico *would be rewarded with [. . .] re-conquered land in New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona.*

The German term for the Zimmermann telegram is *Mexiko-Depesche (Mexico dispatch)*. The telegram is sometimes called the *Zimmermann note* in the literature. This is pointed out to be incorrect in Nickles [38, n. 1, p. 238]. However, page 10 in the Göppert file is a *note verbale*, a low-level but formal type of diplomatic communication, from the German foreign office to ambassador Gerard in Berlin requesting the forwarding of the Zimmermann telegram to von Bernstorff.

In a diplomatic note to Mexico [18, pp. 67–68, 261–262], Lansing wrote on 16 March 1917 that “the Government of the United States has unearthed a plot laid by the Government dominating the Central powers to embroil not only the Government and people of Mexico, but also the Government and people of Japan in war with the United States. At the time this plot was conceived, the United States was at peace with the Government and people of the German Empire”.

The Entente governments also had a relaxed view on territorial integrity. On 8 May 1915, Ambassador Page reported to President Wilson “that England, France, and Russia made a bargain with Italy on April 30th [1915], agreeing to cede to Italy very large parts of Austrian territory [. . .] if Italy comes into the war within a month” [20, p. 239]. And indeed, after the war the defeated countries had their territories cut up and large chunks amputated.

Clearly the episode—together with various well-publicized German sabotage activities—tarnished the image of Germany in the American view.

The biographical dates of some of the *dramatis personae* are: Aguilar (1889–1960), Balfour (1848–1930), Bell (1882–1924), von Bernstorff (1862–1939), von Bethmann Hollweg (1856–1921), Carranza (1859–1920), Cohn (1869–1934), David (1863–1930), Díaz (1830–1915), von Eckardt (1861–1944), Ewing (1855–1935), Gerard (1867–1951), Göppert (1872–1943), de Grey (1886–1951), Hall (1870–1943), House (1858–1938), Hood (1858–1923), von Kemnitz (1870–1955), Knox (1883–1943), Langwerth (1865–1942), Lansing (1864–1928), Montgelas (1860–1938), Page (1855–1918), Pershing (1860–1948), von Stumm (1869–1935), Wilhelm II. (1859–1941), Wilson (1856–1924), Zimmermann (1864–1940).

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