

Office Memorandum

Declassified Under Authority of the Interagency
Security Classification Appeals Panel,
E.O. 13526, sec. 5.3(b)(3)
ISCAP Appeal No. 2008-026, Document 34
Declassification Date: August 31, 2026

TO : THE DIRECTOR

DATE: January 9, 1950

FROM : D. M. LADD

SUBJECT: JUDITH COPLON
ESPIONAGE - R

Mr. Reynolds at my instruction contacted General Carter W. Clarke, Army Security Agency, on the morning of January 9, 1950. (S) [7-9-83]

Mr. Reynolds advised General Clarke that there has been contact at a high level in the Government concerning the use of the diplomatic message which implicated Coplon with Russian espionage as evidence in the Coplon espionage trial. Mr. Reynolds also advised General Clarke that an allegation had been made that there would probably be no objection since the system being used by the Russians has changed since the message under consideration was dispatched. (S) [7-9-83] per letter dated 9/15/83

General Clarke was very much disturbed. He stated that his view, and he felt very strongly in this view, is that this message should not be used as evidence under any circumstances. He pointed out that he felt that irreparable harm would be done not only to what work has previously been accomplished in the field of communications intelligence, but would very likely eliminate communications as a source of intelligence. It was stated that, while General Clarke felt that the Armed Forces Security Agency was possibly infiltrated by Russian agents, the fact remains that those individuals are not aware of what has been accomplished in the field of Russian Air, Navy, Army and diplomatic communications. (S) [7-9-83] per letter dated 9/15/83

General Clarke advised Mr. Reynolds that the Russian system of enciphering communications has not changed. He stated that the Russians use a one-time pad. However, they do duplicate these pads in various parts of the world, which duplication has permitted the Armed Forces Security Agency to read a portion of the communications of the Russian Army, Navy and Air Force and, of course, the diplomatic traffic around 1944. He stated that the Armed Forces Security Agency is constantly alert for further duplication which may be located at any time. He pointed out that, should the Russians become aware of the fact that this duplication enables the American officials to read their communications, they would discontinue the duplication and then no hope would remain of ever reading any Russian communications in the future. (S) [7-9-83] per letter dated 9/15/83

General Clarke again stated that the message in question should not be made available as evidence and that he desired Mr. Reynolds to convey to you that he, General Clarke, would be willing to so state any time or place that such a statement was desired. (S) [7-9-83] per letter dated 9/15/83

Mr. Reynolds pointed out to General Clarke that this information was made available to him for his confidential information with the understanding that he take no action on this information since it might embarrass the Bureau. General Clarke indicated to Mr. Reynolds that he appreciated this fact and would govern himself accordingly. (S) [7-9-83] per letter dated 9/15/83

(S) [General Clarke] was most effusive in his expression of appreciation to the Bureau in making this information known to him. (S) [7-9-83] per letter dated 9/15/83

SWR:hke

SECRET

Tolson ✓
Ladd ✓
Clegg ✓
Glavin ✓
Nichols ✓
Rosen ✓
Tracy ✓
Harbo ✓
Mohr ✓
Tele. Room ✓
Nease ✓
Gandy ✓

[I share Gen. Clarke's view.]

83-0178 / # 84-1526
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#83-0178 / # 84-1524
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SWR:hke 1/9/50

D.M. LADD MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR
RE: JUDITH COPLON
ESPIONAGE - R

7-19-83

~~SECRET~~ *sp/BTS/dd*

Mr. Reynolds contacted Gen'l Carter W. Clarke, Army Security Agency, on morning of 1/9/50. Reynolds advised Clarke there has been contact at high level in Gov't re use of diplomatic message which implicated Coplon with Russian espionage as evidence in trial. Facts set out. *(S)*

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REASON-FCIM, I, 1-2.4.2

DATE OF REVIEW

Tolson ☒Ladd ☒Clegg ☒Glavin ☒Nichols ☒Rosen ☒Tracy ☒Harbo ☒Mohr ☒Tele. Room ☒Nease ☒Gandy ☒

January 9, 1950

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MEMORANDUM FOR MR. TOLSON

Saturday evening Peyton Ford stated that he had been talking to a well-informed individual, whom he later identified as Tom Clark; [that this individual had stated that the Army if necessary would make available in the Coplon case the original information which opened the investigation on Coplon.] Ford asked me to talk to the Director but to no one else about this.

In pinning Ford down further, it develops that Tom Clark had talked to Louis Johnson, apparently some time ago, about the Coplon case and this information. [Johnson had indicated that if the Department was hard pressed and it was necessary, the Army would permit the use of the initial information which opened the investigation--namely, the intercept and the subsequent decoding of the intercept. Johnson had indicated that another circuit was now being used.]

Ford stated that if this could be brought out it would put Palmer and everyone who has been critical of the Coplon case right behind the eight ball because it would establish the direct espionage tie-in on Coplon; that beyond that, if there were ever any other cases there would always be the possibility in the public mind that the initial information came in this manner, and that he thought if this could be done it would end any further criticism on the Coplon case.

I told Ford that I did not think the Director could ever agree to this because of our agreement [with the Army] that it would put us in an extremely bad position; that from a security standpoint we had to think of the future and not only of the Coplon case. He later asked me what the Director's reaction was and I told him that the Director wanted to think this over.

Saturday night at the Touchdown Club dinner, Ford cornered Attorney General McGrath and got clearance on the statement on wire tapping. He told me he was also going to try to get McGrath and Clark together. There was a great deal of difficulty in doing this; however, around 1 a.m. Ford did get McGrath and Tom Clark in a room in Jimmy Conzelman's suite, where they discussed this whole matter. I stood at the door to

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Memorandum to Mr. Tolson

January 9, 1950

block anyone going in.

Subsequently Ford told me that McGrath was heartily in accord with this device, and upon his return to Washington on Tuesday would discuss the matter further as to whether he should take it up with Secretary Johnson. I told Ford, pursuant to his request, that as soon as the Director had had time to think the matter over we would let him know the Director's views.

attached.
I talked to Mr. Ladd regarding the contact between our Liaison Section [and Carter Clark.] Mr. Ladd also informed me that it was his understanding that the Army secured the information as a result of 75X1, 75X3 (S)

If this is the way the Army got the information I think that even though Carter Clark and the Army agree to using the information, we must tell the Department because this would then ruin the entire case and, beyond that, could conceivably precipitate a diplomatic incident. (S)
Undoubtedly when FDR instructed this 75X1, 75X3
75X1, 75X3

although this is something that really does not concern us (S) per letter 9/15/83

Respectfully,

L. B. Nichols

I think Nichols should tell Ford of the source

1-9

2 agree.
H.

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CC-247

Tolson _____
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Nichols _____
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Tele. Room _____
Nease _____
Gandy _____

CLASSIFIED BY SP8 BTB/dcg
DATE OF REVIEW 5-24-92
5-24-82

January 10, 1950

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MEMORANDUM FOR MR. TOLSON

I saw Peyton Ford this morning. I told him with reference to our conversations regarding the feasibility of getting clearance from the Army to use the source of original information in the Coplon case that there were several considerations, that I had checked around and that the best information was that the Army had secured the information as a result of [redacted] 75X1, 75X3 that this [redacted] 75X1, 75X3 was initiated on the order of the late FDR and [redacted] 75X1, 75X3 that obviously if this ever came out it would be disastrous. *Spur from Lake*

In the second place I told him that from an intelligence standpoint there were a lot of complicated cryptographic problems and that it was understood that the Russians used an enciphering code which is used on one occasion in each country but is duplicated and used in other countries, thus the codes used in this country several years ago might be used in some other country today and vice versa, further that the whole intelligence operation was tied up by a series of agreements that we participated in with the British and vice versa, that if this information were used we were convinced that it would throw consternation in intelligence circles and would probably result in the Bureau and the Department not receiving any of this confidential traffic.

I further told him the Director, after giving the matter mature thought and consideration, had come to the conclusion it would be most unwise to use.

Ford stated he could not conceive of Johnson saying the information could be used unless he first checked with his intelligence people, that he thought if Johnson ruled this could be used, this would be ample protection for the Bureau and the Department. I told him obviously it would be if he checked with his intelligence people and secured their recommendation that it be used. He stated he would make this clear to the Attorney General, that no one knows about this except the Attorney General, the Director, Tom Clark, him and me.

Respectfully,

~~SECRET~~

L. B. Nichols

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