

May 20, 1953

COPY OF TELEGRAM SENT BY GENERAL SMITH
TO AMBASSADOR DILLON.

REFTEL 5972. UR views on Rosenberg case appreciated and carefully studied. Since case has gone twice to Supreme Court which has not yet handed down decision on latest appeal and since appeal for clemency to President has been rejected, I do not feel there is any further recommendation at this time, which I can make to the President. I have however forwarded to him your TEL and this reply in order that he may be informed of UR views.

SMITH



ACTING

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Authority

By

State # 8/15/28

NLE DATE

9/9/25

SECRET SECURITY INFORMATION - May 15, 1953.
No. 5972. From Ambassador Dillon for "Eyes Only" Secretary of State.

I am deeply concerned with long term effect of possible execution of Rosenbergs on French opinion.

This mission has concerned itself particularly with Rosenberg case and has undertaken all possible measures designed to inform and persuade French opinion of scrupulous fairness of trial and validity of verdict of guilty as charged. We have also specifically exposed and refuted Communist distortions and claims that Rosenbergs victims racial persecution and political witch-hunting. I believe that our efforts, and especially documentation on case now available, have contributed to acceptance by majority French interested opinion, other than that willfully following party line, that Rosenbergs had fair trial and are guilty of charges brought against them.

At the same time, fact of matter is that even those who accept guilt of Rosenbergs are overwhelmingly of opinion that death sentence unjustifiable punishment for offenses as revealed by trial, particularly when compared with prison terms meted to British scientists Allan Nunn May and Klaus Fuchs.

In addition to this, following important factors have combined to reinforce sentiment that even though guilty Rosenbergs should not (repeat not) get death: (1) marital and parental status Rosenbergs; (2) family connection Greenglass without whose testimony charges could not (repeat not) have been brought home; (3) protracted delays; and (4) latest doubts aroused as to reliability Greenglass testimony by publication statement -- allegedly in Greenglass handwriting -- whose authenticity not (repeat not) yet denied. (Press here has run photostats of statement in which Greenglass writes that what he told FBI may not have been true. See EMBTEL 5582, April 20. Department has informed Embassy such a statement "may well exist.") Substantial segment of French opinion also makes a distinction between degree of guilt of Rosenberg as a principal, and his wife as an accessory.

We should not (repeat not) deceive ourselves by thinking that this sentiment is due principally to Communist propaganda or that people who take this position are unconscious dupes of Communists. Fact is that the great majority of French people of all political leanings feel that death sentence is completely unjustified from moral standpoint and is due only to political climate peculiar to United States now (repeat now) and at time when trial took place, even though trial itself conducted with fullest protection rights individual.

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State Ltr 8/15/85

By

NLE DATE

9/9/75

While over here, Mr. Cohn of Senator McCarthy's staff publicly sought to convince European opinion of his maturity experience in spite of his youth by claiming that he prosecuted Rosenbergs. In the light of highly unfavorable reaction of Europe opinion to mission and views of Messrs. Cohn and Schine, nothing could be better calculated than this claim to convince waverers that Rosenbergs, if executed, will be victims of what European press freely terms "McCarthyism".

In view of the foregoing considerations, I feel bound to bring to your attention our strong conviction that if death sentence is carried out, this will have a most harmful long term effect on the opinion and attitude of the French people towards the United States.

We therefore urge that an appraisal of the Rosenberg sentence be made in terms of the higher national interest.

I realize that the Communist Party will exploit any commutation as evidence that trial was unfair, but I am convinced that any propaganda capital Communist Party would and could make in short run out of this obvious line would mean little compared with long term damage that execution of Rosenbergs would do to foreign opinion of US and of our whole democratic processes.

DILLON



~~SECRET SECURITY INFORMATION~~