

David Kahn
Windsor Gate
Great Neck, New York

February 9, 1955

General G. B. Erskine, USMC (Ret)
Assistant to the Secretary of Defense
Department of Defense
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear General Erskine:

On behalf of the New York Cipher Society, I want to thank you for your full and thoughtful replay to our statement "To Improve Our Cryptographic Defenses." It is petition and interaction of this sort between the government and interested citizens that has helped to make this country great.

With respect to your statement, I would repeat the Society's feeling that the government is doing an excellent job in the cryptographic field. We were especially strengthened in this feeling by hearing of the Scientific Advisory Board, the panels of specialists, and the contracts with laboratories and universities. However, it seems to us that the Society's philosophy of cryptographic security remains at odds with the government's. In this regard, two points at the crux of the matter deserve reply.

One is that, in our view, our position -- particularly that with regard to cryptographic textbooks -- does not violate either the letter or the spirit of Public Law 513. This law is designed to prevent disclosure of specific code or cipher systems; the Society agrees with this wholeheartedly but reaffirms that the principles of cryptography should be publicly disseminated by the government. Secondly, we feel that your letter sidestepped the questions of whether there is a need for a potential pool of cryptographers and how this should be built up. While heartily approving the Armed Forces training program, we believe that it does not go far enough in assuring the nation of the cryptographers it may suddenly need.

It is unfortunate that the government and the Society disagree on a matter so vital to the nation's security. However, we can both take heart from the facts that the disagreement lies only in the means, not in the ends, and that disagreements, at least in this democracy, usually lead to a better way of doing things.

Very truly yours,

s/ David Kahn

President
New York Cipher Society

C O P Y