

4 February 1955

Mr. David Kahn, President  
New York Cipher Society  
Windsor Gate  
Great Neck, New York

Dear Mr. Kahn:

Thank you for your letter of 28 December 1954, which accompanies the New York Cipher Society's statement entitled "To Improve Our Cryptographic Defenses." As indicated in my letter of 11 January 1955, the subject has been discussed with representatives of the Director, National Security Agency. The Director concurs in this reply.

The activities and operations to which the Society's statement pertains fall in that category of information which I am sure we all agree is not only sensitive but vital to our national security. Recognizing this fact, the 81st Congress, after extended discussions, passed Public Law 513, which President Truman approved on 13 May 1950. This law, codified as Section 798 of Title 18 of the United States Code, embodies legislation designed specifically to protect United States communications intelligence activities and United States codes and ciphers.

It is evident that the position taken by the New York Cipher Society is, at least in part, consistent with the principle upon which this special legislation rests, i.e., rather stringent protective measures are necessary for most of the information in the cryptologic category.

At the same time, the serious problem of protecting vital security information without depriving the general public of knowledge to which it is entitled has also been recognized and studied intensively by your government. Immediately after his inauguration, President Eisenhower called for a review of Executive Order 10290 of 24 September 1951, which established policy and procedures governing the transmission and safekeeping of official information. As a direct result of this review, the President issued Executive Order 10501, dated 5 November 1953 and effective on 15 December 1953. It is under the terms of this order, rather than Executive Order 10450, as noted in your Society's study, that official documents are classified. (Executive Order 10450 prescribes personnel security requirements for government employees.)

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The decision to raise or lower the classification of official information requires judicious interpretation of Executive Order 10501 in each specific case. It is true that certain official documents pertaining to cryptography and cryptanalysis were upgraded as a result of this Order. It should be noted, however, that each document so upgraded was carefully and judiciously reviewed to determine whether it should be considered unclassified or should be accorded protection by use of an appropriate classification. In each case the decision was made in the light of what responsible authorities in the Department of Defense considered not only permissible within the limitation of the special legislation mentioned above but also in the best interests of national defense.

Due consideration was given in these decisions to the point mentioned in your paper with regard to the development of a "potential pool of cryptographers." It is recognized that the number of persons qualified to execute specialized jobs in the cryptologic field could be augmented by the production of training literature which could be widely disseminated and available to amateur cryptologists. Appreciation of this need has caused the Armed Forces to institute many steps to increase the number of men and women in the Armed Forces qualified in this field. I am certain you will understand, however, that this is but one of many methods of enhancing and preserving our national security which must be considered and weighed by those responsible for that security.

There is also general agreement as to the fruitfulness of outside criticism and suggestion. That the suggestions and assistance from persons outside government cryptologic activities are considered desirable and valuable is evidenced by the fact that a Scientific Advisory Board composed of the most highly-qualified scientists in several fields related to the cryptologic field assists and advises the Director of the National Security Agency. The Board in turn is assisted by several panels likewise composed of eminent specialists in special fields pertaining to communications intelligence and communications security. In addition, government contracts have been let with several universities and certain highly-qualified industrial laboratories in order to take advantage of the special skills possessed by individuals outside government service.

As you can see, the general problem is considerably broader and more inclusive than the science of cryptography. It is, however, a problem toward whose solution the scientific community and the government are both working so that the best interests of this nation can be appropriately served.

Sincerely,

s/ G. B. Erskine  
t/ G. B. ERSKINE  
General, USMC (Ret)  
Assistant to the Secretary of Defense  
(Special Operations)