Senator Arthur Robinson of Indiana Vindicated: William Bullitt's Secret Mission to Europe

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Almost as soon as the votes had been counted in November, 1932, President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt began preparations for launching his new administration. In the field of foreign policy these preparations included regular and extensive communication over the next several months with Herbert Hoover's Secretary of State, Henry L. Stimson.¹ The diplomatic preparations also included the sending of a personal emissary, William C. Bullitt, on a mysterious trip to heads of government in Europe.² Doubt as to Bullitt's exact status caused much discussion in the newspapers and on the Senate floor during the early part of 1933. Senator Arthur Robinson of Indiana, for example, asserted but could not successfully prove that Bullitt was in fact Roosevelt's emissary and was sounding out foreign leaders on matters of diplomacy, conveying some of the President-elect's ideas on the same matters, and making preliminary arrangements for high-level diplomatic discussions after the inauguration. The evidence that Robinson needed and failed to get from his

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¹ From January 2 to March 3, 1933, the period of the principal events discussed in this article, Stimson talked with Roosevelt, Cordell Hull, and other Roosevelt representatives on twenty-six different occasions. Of this number, four conversations were with Roosevelt directly, eight with Hull, his Secretary of State-to-be. See Desk Diaries, LC 67 A, Cordell Hull Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington.

Republican friends in the State Department has since been found in the Hyde Park archives and elsewhere.

William C. Bullitt had been a presidential emissary once before. As President Woodrow Wilson's representative he had approached Soviet leaders concerning ways of bringing about peace in Russia after World War I. Bullitt returned with an offer which on the face of it should have pleased Wilson and the Allied leaders, since Lenin expressed readiness to accept severe limitations on Soviet territorial claims as one of the conditions of peace. The Allies, however, still hoped that the Soviets would disappear altogether; and by the time of Bullitt's return Wilson himself had apparently changed his mind about the advisability of dealing with Soviet Russia. The President therefore chose to disregard the proposals his representative brought back. Bullitt soon broke with Wilson, became one of the latter's severest critics, and left the political limelight until the nomination of Franklin D. Roosevelt for the presidency.

In the interim between his service with Wilson and his service with Roosevelt, Bullitt, a wealthy Philadelphian, occupied himself with his many talents as writer and man of the world. While eschewing politics, he continued to study Soviet Russia, culminating his long interest with a private visit to the Soviet Union in May and June of 1932. During this trip he renewed his acquaintance with men such as Maxim Litvinov, Chicherin's successor as foreign minister. Immediately after his return, Bullitt began efforts to get in touch with Roosevelt. By September he had succeeded; and

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5 He wrote a novel, It's Not Done (New York, 1926), did some editing and painting, and was with the Famous-Players-Lasky Corporation for a short time. See New York Times, Nov. 18, 20, 1933. See also Who's Who in America, 1934-35 and Berliner Borsen Courier, Nov. 23, 1933.
6 The best evidence of this is the skill and knowledge Bullitt brought to his job as the first ambassador to the Soviet Union. An interesting sidelight of his keeping up with the contacts he made during his trip to Russia can be seen in William Harlan Hale, "The Road to Yalta," America and Russia: A Century and a Half of Dramatic Encounters, ed. Oliver Jensen (New York, 1962).
7 Gilchrist Baker Stockton, Vienna, to Secretary of State, Feb. 6, 1933, State Department Files, 111.028 Bullitt, National Archives, Washington.
by the end of the year he was off to Europe, where in January he began his mysterious work for the President-elect.

Bullitt returned to politics at the depth of the depression. The world was in a diplomatic turmoil because of the emergence of Japanese imperialism, the rise of Hitler, the failure of the United States' Allies to pay their war debts, and related factors. Bullitt's wide knowledge of affairs and his personal acquaintance with many European leaders made him a natural choice as a foreign policy adviser. Roosevelt's use of the Philadelphian in secret, personal diplomacy before the inauguration may be understood as the result of several factors, the principal one being the prolonged period between the election and his inauguration. This was the last time in American history when a President-elect waited from November until March to be inaugurated, and it was a bad time for such a delay. European leadership was eager to know Roosevelt's attitude on many questions, particularly the problem of war debts; and Roosevelt quite naturally was chafing at the bit to get on the job and let his ideas be known. A private tour by Bullitt, who could be publicly ignored or denounced, may have seemed, for the President-elect, the safest compromise between inaction and rash public statements.

Roosevelt often used personal emissaries to heads of government in a private or secret manner. Rumors circulated as early as December, 1932, that the President-elect had already sent several such emissaries to Europe and South America. Until late in January, however, nothing startling had turned up in relation to this practice of Roosevelt's. Then, when an effort was made at a January 26 news conference to clarify the relationship of the President-elect to Bullitt, the former cut short the conference, later letting it be known "authoritatively" that he had no one representing him in Europe.

The persistent rumors to the contrary, however, had aroused the concern of Republican Senator Arthur Robinson of Indiana, who sensed in them wrongdoing on Roosevelt's part. Robinson was a thoroughgoing Republican with long experience in politics. He had been a delegate to the Republican national conventions in 1924 and 1932. Prior to his

emergence on the national scene he had served four years in the Indiana Senate and another four years as a judge of the Marion County, Indiana, Superior Court. In the state Senate, he had been floor leader all four years and president *pro tem* his last term.\(^\text{12}\) In 1925, Republican Governor Ed Jackson appointed him to fill the vacancy created by the death of Democratic Senator Samuel M. Ralston. The voters retained Robinson in his federal Senate seat in 1926,\(^\text{13}\) and by 1933 he had nearly eight years Senate experience behind him.

In the United States Senate Robinson had been concerned principally with financial problems, especially matters involving war debts owed the United States. Between January 20 and February 3, 1933, the Senator had spoken sixteen times on the matter of foreign debts. His position was simple and straightforward, in the direct tradition of Coolidge's "They hired the money, didn't they?" The Robinson version was expressed as follows:

A man who refuses to pay his honest debts is without standing, esteem, or respect in the community. France and other defaulters have placed themselves in this category in world opinion.\(^\text{14}\)

The Hoosier Senator also felt that certain Eastern banking interests were behind the propaganda in this country to forego collection of war debts, since this would help protect private loans made to these same countries by the bankers.\(^\text{15}\)

At the height of his concern with war debts in January, 1933, Robinson heard about Bullitt's trip to heads of governments; he was also led to believe that Bullitt was discussing the alarming possibility of scaling debts down as much as 80 per cent.\(^\text{16}\) This was too much for the Senator; and on January 25, 1933, he arose in the Senate for a lengthy indictment of both Roosevelt's handling of the war debts question and of Bullitt's role as Roosevelt's representative. Robinson based his indictment in large part on an article from the Washington

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\(^{12}\) *Who's Who in America, 1950-51.*


\(^{14}\) *Congressional Record, 72 Cong., 2 Sess.*, 2136.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 2137.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 2468.
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Herald, the following Universal News Service item being the heart of it:

William C. Bullitt, Woodrow Wilson's representative on the special mission to Russia . . . has been in London several days on a secret mission in which he is declared to be acting as the "emissary" of President-elect Roosevelt.

Bullitt, it was learned to-day, visited Chequers, Prime Minister MacDonald's official country residence, Saturday, and No. 10 Downing Street, MacDonald's town residence, to-day.

In the same authoritative quarter, which declared Bullitt is the emissary of Roosevelt, it was declared the American told a prominent British statesman that Roosevelt favors a reduction of the British war debt by 80 per cent.17

Democrats in the Senate spiritedly defended the President-elect. Senator Burton Wheeler of Montana, who asserted that his own confidence in Roosevelt forbade him to believe that FDR would advocate an 80 per cent reduction, argued that one should not believe everything that one read in the newspapers.18 Senator Joseph Robinson of Arkansas dismissed the newspaper article as mere rumor and the charges based on it as self-evidently absurd.19 Other Democrats argued the same themes until they had demonstrated to their own satisfaction that the Bullitt story was sheer rumor.

Robinson's faith in the newspaper despatches remained unshaken, however; and on February 2, 1933, he raised the question once again on the Senate floor by quoting a Universal Service despatch from Berlin, dated February 1:

William C. Bullitt, America's self-described secret emissary, paid calls in German official quarters here Monday and then left for Vienna, it was learned to-day.

Covering his tracks under an assumed name, Bullitt came from London and Paris, where he talked with Prime Minister MacDonald and French Premier Paul-Boncour.

In Berlin he called on Foreign Minister Von Neurath and the chief of the American division in the German foreign office.

London and Paris dispatches state Bullitt described himself in those capitals as the representative of President-elect Roosevelt, despite Roosevelt's denial that Bullitt or anyone else was representing him.

Bullitt registered in Berlin under another name and asked that his presence be kept secret. He expressed himself bitterly over what he termed the London "indiscretions" which exposed his mission.20

17 Ibid.,
18 Ibid
19 Ibid., 2470-71.
20 Ibid., 3146.
The Senator then asked, "Who is this man Bullitt, and what is he doing in Europe, and whom does he represent?"\(^2\)

On the face of it the Senator from Indiana was returning to the Bullitt issue on the basis of exactly the same kind of evidence which members of the Democratic majority had dismissed as mere rumor on January 25. Robinson continued, however, to make additional observations and charges as though the newspaper reports were true. According to him it was safe to assume Bullitt did not represent Hoover; and since Roosevelt had denied (according to the news story of January 26) that Bullitt represented him, then the self-styled secret emissary might properly be apprehended and brought to justice under the Logan Act. This legislation, passed in 1799, made it a crime for a private citizen, without authority from the government, to carry on "verbal... intercourse with any foreign government... with an intent to influence the measures or conduct of any foreign government...."\(^2\)

Robinson then argued that the matter should be brought to the State Department's attention. He was in earnest. The next day the Senator wrote to Under Secretary of State William R. Castle, Jr., requesting information on Bullitt's activities abroad and suggesting that he be apprehended and prosecuted if his mission actually was as described in the newspapers.\(^3\)

In the meantime, on the Senate floor, Robinson was made the butt of ridicule for repeating his January 25 indiscretion. Senator Marvel Mills Logan of Kentucky, who claimed to be a kinsman of the Logan whose offence had brought about the Logan Act, suggested that a telegram be sent to Roosevelt urging that he stop considering the war debts (allegedly the principal topic of Bullitt's conversations with foreign heads of government) because "it is worrying the distinguished junior Senator from Indiana until he is not able to discharge his duties in the United States Senate."\(^4\)

Democratic Senator Joseph Robinson of Arkansas told a lengthy joke ridiculing

\(^{21}\)Ibid.


\(^{23}\)Senator Arthur R. Robinson to Secretary of State, Feb. 3, 1933, State Department Files, 111.028 Bullitt/1. See also William R. Castle, Jr., for Senator Arthur R. Robinson for Secretary of State, Feb. 4, 1933, State Department Files, 111.028 Bullitt/7.

\(^{24}\)Congressional Record, 72 Cong., 2 Sess., 3146.
the Indiana Senator’s questioning of Bullitt’s role and then made it clear that in his opinion the subject was hardly worth pursuing further:

the statement has been made by the President elect, Mr. Roosevelt, that the gentleman referred to by the junior Senator from Indiana has no authority to represent him, and I think that statement should be accepted without question. Having made some inquiry into the subject, I am convinced that the declaration is accurate.25

The Arkansan Senator was most fortunate in his choice of words, perhaps designedly, since they expressed the exact state of affairs, no more, no less. He did not say that Bullitt did not represent Roosevelt; he said Bullitt had no authority to represent Roosevelt. The statement was indeed accurate, for who could give a private citizen authority to represent the New York governor in dealing with foreign heads of government on matters involving the entire United States? Robinson also thought “the statement should be accepted without question.” The Senator from Arkansas no doubt did think this; and no doubt Roosevelt and Bullitt agreed. Such uncritical acceptance would have saved both of them a lot of embarrassment! Having thus stilled the waters with the oil of double talk, Robinson of Arkansas probably believed he had effectively quieted Robinson of Indiana on the Bullitt issue.

But the Hoosier Senator refused to be quieted. As noted earlier he requested on February 3 that the State Department give him a run-down on Bullitt’s activities abroad. Under Secretary of State Castle met the Senator’s request immediately. On February 4, a circular message signed by Secretary of State Stimson went to the embassies in Paris, London, Berlin, and Vienna asking for further information on Bullitt.26 Within three days, the answers were back and copies were in the hands of Robinson of Indiana.27 Vienna reported that the suspected secret emissary had been frequently to Vienna and once to Russia during the previous year—at times incognito.28 From London the ambassador reported that “reliable witnesses” had seen him leaving No. 10 Down-

25 Ibid., 3147.
26 Circular, Feb. 4, 1933, State Department Files, 111.028 Bullitt/2.
28 Gilchrist Baker Stockton, Vienna, to Secretary of State, Feb. 6, 1933, State Department Files, 111.028 Bullitt.
ing Street on more than one occasion the previous month.\textsuperscript{29} Berlin indicated that Bullitt had been there six weeks previously but had made no statement about himself other than as a person “interested in foreign affairs.”\textsuperscript{30} Paris reported that the Philadelphian had been closeted with Premier Joseph Paul-Boncour for half an hour on January 27 and gave a summary of the general terms of their talk.\textsuperscript{31}

Castle’s inquiries of the State Department failed to find evidence about Bullitt that went materially beyond the news stories; moreover, both before and after the exchange with Robinson, Castle reassured ambassadors to this country that Bullitt did not represent the President-elect. On February 2, the day before Robinson’s inquiry, Castle had informed the German Ambassador that it was “exceedingly unlikely” that Bullitt “was on any mission from Mr. Roosevelt.”\textsuperscript{32} On February 9 the Under Secretary cabled John Garrett, United States ambassador to Italy, that the Italian Ambassador had been informed that Bullitt could have no representative status for the President-elect since Roosevelt had denied reports to that effect.\textsuperscript{33}

The failure of the Department of State, still directed by the Republican administration, to offer convincing evidence to sustain the news stories made it impossible for Robinson to do more with his charges. The Democratic majority certainly would not tolerate a third attack based on “mere rumour.” Thus the matter was dropped.

Now, a generation later, evidence has been discovered which verifies the contemporary news stories and even goes beyond them in demonstrating that Bullitt was not only acting as Roosevelt’s personal emissary in informal conversations with European heads of government and foreign ministers but was carrying on these conversations in a way rather more suggestive of diplomacy than journalism.

\textsuperscript{29} Andrew Mellon, London, to Secretary of State, Feb. 6, 1933, State Department Files, 111.028 Bullitt.

\textsuperscript{30} Frederick Moseley Sackett, Jr., Berlin, to Secretary of State, Feb. 6, 1933, State Department Files, 111.028 Bullitt.

\textsuperscript{31} Walter Evans Edge, Paris, to Secretary of State, Feb. 6, 1933, State Department Files, 111.028 Bullitt.

\textsuperscript{32} J. G. Rogers for Secretary of State to Albert W. Kliefoth, Feb. 2, 1933, State Department Files, 111.028 Bullitt/10.

\textsuperscript{33} William R. Castle, Jr., for Secretary of State to John Garret, Feb. 9, 1933, State Department Files, 111.028 Bullitt/14.
Between January 23 and February 1, 1933, Bullitt sent a series of telegrams in code to Miss Margaret LeHand, Roosevelt’s secretary, at Warm Springs, Georgia, where the President-elect was resting and preparing for the work ahead. The subject matter and wording of these decoded telegrams established beyond a doubt that Bullitt considered himself Roosevelt’s personal emissary on a trip clearly designed to bring about an exchange of ideas between the President-elect and heads of government in Europe. There is even some indication in the telegrams that Roosevelt was seeking diplomatic commitments in advance of his inauguration. The facts that the telegrams were in code and that both Bullitt and spokesmen for the President-elect steadily denied the information revealed by the telegrams leave the impression that both Roosevelt and Bullitt feared the results of public revelation of their relationship at this point.

By comparing the published news reports with the secret telegrams, additional evidence can be gained. On January 23, 1933, Bullitt sent the following cable in code, clearly revealing the quasi-diplomatic nature of his journey:

MY CONVERSATION WITH CHAMBERLAIN AND MACDONALD SHOWS THAT IT IS POSSIBLE FOR ENGLAND TO RETURN TO THE GOLD STANDARD AM LEAVING FOR FRANCE WEDNESDAY THE P M SAID HE HOPED COMMUNICATIONS WOULD NOT BE SENT HIM THROUGH LORD READING.84

The next day, January 24, William Hillman in a copyrighted story for Universal News Service, published the first reports on Bullitt’s alleged activities as Roosevelt’s agent abroad. Hillman mentioned Bullitt’s visit to Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald at his official residence and something of the nature of the conversation. The article also intimated that a strong effort was being made to hide Bullitt’s real status.

British officials are declared to have been advised from an important quarter that Bullitt’s mission must not be made known to the Washington State Department. For this reason they are said to be puzzled as to his exact status.

In his London hotel last night Bullitt refused to be seen.85

85 “Papers of the Democratic National Committee,” photostatic copy, President’s Personal File, 1124.
On the next day, January 25, Robinson, as indicated previously, made his charges in the Senate.

Bullitt's coded cablegram of January 26 would have given sobering substance to many of Robinson's accusations. In this communication with Roosevelt Bullitt refers to a plan "we decided on" regarding war debts payments; mentions arrangements which were discussed regarding proposed pre-inaugural confidential conversations between Roosevelt and ex-Premier, party leader Edouard Herriot; and indicates that Premier Boncour conveyed a "definite promise" that France would not make a loan to Japan:

TODAY HELD TWO INTIMATE CONVERSATIONS WITH BONCOUR YOUR GOOD WILL TOWARD FRANCE HAS MOVED HIM AND HE HOPES BY FOLLOWING PLAN WE DECIDED ON THAT IT WILL BE POSSIBLE TO OBTAIN PAYMENT DUE LAST DECEMBER SHORTLY AFTER INAUGURATION HE EXPECTS TO ASK HERRIOT TO GO TO AMERICA OSTEBSIENLY ON LEC- TURE TRIP BUT IN REALITY TO HAVE CONFIDENTIAL TALK WITH YOU THIS WOULD BEGIN FEBRUARY TWENTY FIRST IN CASE THE BONCOUR MINISTRY SHOULD FALL A NEW GOVERNMENT WOULD ADHERE TO THIS PROJECT HE GAVE DEFINITE PROMISE THAT NO LOAN WOULD BE GIVEN TO JAPAN I AM LEAVING FOR GERMANY TOMORROW.

The same day that Roosevelt received this telegram he cut short a news conference and "hence no comment could be obtained" in reply to queries as to whether Bullitt was representing him in Europe and whether he intended to cut the European debt. The news report went on to say, "It was learned authoritatively, however, that Mr. Roosevelt has no one representing him in Europe. . . ." On the next day, January 27, the New York Times reported a reiteration of the official statement to the effect that "neither Prime Minister MacDonald nor any other member of the British Government has seen or received a communication from any emissary of Mr. Roosevelt." Despite the denials, the Times continued, "reports persist that Mr. Bullitt did see Mr. MacDonald."

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36 William C. Bullitt to Margaret LeHand, Jan. 26, 1933, President’s Personal File, 1124.
38 Ibid., Jan. 27, 1933.
As in London and Paris, so in Berlin, both the press and the State Department were aware of Bullitt's moves but were unable to prove he was actually Roosevelt's emissary. Again, a decoded telegram reveals the connection between the President-elect and Bullitt:

HAVE HAD TALK WITH BUELOW AND NEURATH THE LATTER EXPECTING REMAIN AS MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT OR ELSE HINDENBURG WILL EMPOWER HIM TO CARRY THROUGH THE POLICIES OF DECEMBER OUTLINE FULL RELIANCE CAN BE PLACED ON FRENCH AND GERMAN SUPPORT FOR RETURN OF ENGLAND TO GOLD STANDARD RECENT PUBLICITY HAS MADE CONVERSATION WITH OTHERS DANGEROUS AM GOING TO AUSTRIA TOMORROW.39

Sent right at the time Hitler became chancellor, the telegram shows a surprising misconception, perhaps typical of those times, of the sources of power in Germany. More to the point, it, like the other telegraphic correspondence between Roosevelt and Bullitt, reveals a confidential agent greatly concerned that the true nature of his mission not be discovered.

On February 1 Bullitt telegraphed Roosevelt:

TELEGRAM JUST RECEIVED FROM BONCOUR FRENCH GOVERNMENT NEVERTHELESS ADHERES DEBT PAYMENT PROJECT I GO FRANCE TOMORROW HERRIOT WILL TAKE STEAMER AS ARRANGED.40

Boncour, apparently, had little doubt as to Bullitt's relation to Roosevelt.

The very next day, February 2, Robinson made his second set of charges in the Senate and the game was on. The accusations spread around the world in a matter of hours.

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39 William C. Bullitt, Berlin, to Margaret LeHand, Jan. 30 or 31, 1933, President's Personal File, 1124.
40 William C. Bullitt, Vienna, to Margaret LeHand, Feb. 1, 1933, President's Personal File, 1124. Other telegrams from Bullitt in this same file and along these same lines include one from London on Jan. 24, 1933, giving MacDonald's assurance that a Japanese loan will not be allowed to be floated in England; one on Jan. 30, 1933, mentioning a talk with von Beulow and Neurath; on Feb. 1, 1933, regarding an assurance from Boncour that Herriot was to take the steamer "as arranged"; while there is also an interesting note from Bullitt on Apr. 10, 1933, mentioning his continued conversations with European leaders and his pleasure at being assured that he would receive a high office in the Department of State.
Der Wiener Tag printed the story with the charges on February 3;\(^{41}\) and on that same day Gilchrist Baker Stockton, United States envoy in Vienna, cabled the Secretary of State concerning them.\(^{42}\) The New York Times carried the Senator's comments in full, noting the Senate's reaction,\(^{43}\) as did other newspapers and news services. For the moment Robinson of Indiana was riding the headlines ahead of Robinson of Arkansas, and it looked as if a major political issue might yet be made of it.

As already indicated, the Hoosier Senator failed to convince his colleagues with news stories and also failed to get more concrete evidence from the State Department. The failure in both instances must be attributed to Bullitt's success in throwing reporters and agents off the scent. In the course of his junkets to No. 10 Downing Street, the Quai d'Orsay, the Wilhelmstrasse, and Vienna, he had used assumed names, failed to turn up at apartments he had rented in his own name, put on disguises, and in general behaved as secret agents are supposed to behave.\(^{44}\) His favorite device, however, was simply to deny that he was doing what he was doing; and he used this technique when he returned to the United States on February 16 in order to send all rumors and charges to their final rest. The New York Times reported this final diplomatic maneuver on the part of Bullitt as follows:

William C. Bullitt, American writer, who has figured in the foreign press as visiting France and England to make unofficial inquiries on the war-debt question on behalf of President-elect Roosevelt, returned yesterday on the North German Lloyd liner Europa and denounced these reports as "ridiculous and sheer nonsense."

"I have just been away on one of my usual trips to Europe," he said, "as I have been doing for the last ten years, to get the correct data for the book I am preparing on statesmanship."

[When asked], "In your conversations with the Premiers of Great Britain and France, did you discuss the payment of the war debts?"

\(^{41}\) Vienna, Austria, Der Wiener Tag, Feb. 3, 1933, State Department Files, 111.028 Bullitt.
\(^{42}\) Gilchrist Baker Stockton, Vienna, to Secretary of State, Feb. 3, 1933, State Department Files, 111.028 Bullitt/15.
\(^{43}\) New York Times, Feb. 3, 1933. The article notes that Roosevelt denies the story.
\(^{44}\) Ibid., Jan. 26, 27, 28, Feb. 3, 5, 6, 7, 16, 1933.
"I certainly did not," was Mr. Bullitt's reply. "I am simply interested in my book..."45

While the decoded telegrams seem to establish the essential truth of the newspaper stories, a much stronger case can be made for Bullitt's being a personal emissary of the President-elect. It can now be established that such was the intent of both Roosevelt and Bullitt before the journey was even begun.

In July, 1932, Louis Wehle, a friend of Roosevelt's, and Colonel E. M. House, Wilson's friend now back actively in Democratic politics, concluded that Bullitt was one of the few men in the Democratic party with enough knowledge about foreign affairs to be helpful to Roosevelt, whose own *forte* was domestic policy.46 Wehle told Bullitt of this opinion, went over certain foreign policy matters with him, and arranged to set the scene for a meeting between the two men at a later date.47

Bullitt was clearly willing to become one of Roosevelt's foreign policy advisers. In September he wrote the Democratic candidate offering his services in the area of foreign policy and received the following reply:

Please let me tell you how much I appreciate your offer of service to me during the campaign in connection with foreign policy issues. I am most anxious to avail myself of your help. . . .48

Thus encouraged, Bullitt made a substantial financial contribution to Roosevelt's campaign and on September 23 received a personal thank-you note for it.49 On October 5 the two men finally met and immediately became fast friends.50

After the election, on November 16, Wehle suggested to FDR that his new friend be sent to Europe to bring the President-elect up to date on events since June, 1932, the month that Bullitt had returned from his previous trip to

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48 Roosevelt to William C. Bullitt, Sept. 12, 1932, President's Personal File, 1124.
49 William C. Bullitt to Roosevelt, Sept. 14, 1932, President's Personal File, 1124; Roosevelt to William C. Bullitt, Sept. 23, 1932, *ibid*.
Wehle furthermore suggested the conditions on which Bullitt should be sent, namely: "on his own initiative and resources"; to get "up-to-date information on the chances of a reconciliation being promoted between France and Germany with Britain as the third party in a three-power treaty"; and to learn "what the European Cabinets were likely to propose about the December 15th installment payments on the debts."\(^{52}\)

Wehle thought Bullitt would be discreet on such a trip, and this proved to be the case. The former then noted that on November 28, 1932, he "began receiving cables from him [Bullitt] in our own code" about his visits with MacDonald, Herriot, Berengar, and other leaders and "made it a point to relay to Albany copies of my decodings of his messages." In these cables, Bullitt said among other things that fundamental debt adjustments were needed to prevent the fall of governments and even revolution. He was also pessimistic about reconciliation between Germany and France.\(^{53}\)

The trip was so successful in Roosevelt's eyes that he even thought of going through Europe with Bullitt before inauguration and actually had an itinerary arranged. As it turned out, such a trip was not possible; and on January 13 Bullitt began his second jaunt, this time keeping in direct touch with the President-elect, a new code being made up "of which Roosevelt had a copy that he might receive cables directly."\(^{54}\) Wehle does not quote these cables, and heretofore his statements could reasonably have been doubted. But now that copies of the telegrams have been found in the Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, historians can accept *Hidden Threads of History* with greater faith.

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\(^{51}\) Ibid., 118.

\(^{52}\) Ibid.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 118-19.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 120-23. Wehle points out the efforts to keep Bullitt's trip secret and attributes the news stories to a leak from a particular but unnamed confidant. On p. 121 he also uses the word "distorted" rather than "false" in describing these stories; "the distorted report that Bullitt would be negotiating in Europe as representative of the President-elect."
Wehle's analysis, confirmed by the copies of the actual telegrams, has every evidence of veracity about it; but it is given greater credence by other witnesses from the time. As indicated earlier, the New York Times of December 21, 1932, pointed out that while Hoover had favored formal commissions despite all their attendant publicity, Roosevelt favored personal representatives reporting to him alone and preferably without publicity.\textsuperscript{55} It is entirely possible that there were a great many such personal representatives at large in the winter of 1932-33 who have not yet been uncovered. In the recently opened diaries of Raymond Clapper, the President was authoritatively reported to be “sending secret agents to South America, Asia, and Europe to report back to Roosevelt,” although names of individuals had not been found.\textsuperscript{56}

Was Bullitt then in fact a secret agent of Roosevelt's? In the sense of an individual's reporting secretly on specific matters to the President-elect, he clearly was. Using this definition, the French generally assumed that Bullitt was sent to “collect information and perhaps give some” in conversations with heads of government about the President-elect.\textsuperscript{57} In England, the London Daily Mail suggested that Bullitt's visit was “believed to be that of an observer of foreign affairs in behalf of the new United States administration and it is gathered that war debts was one of the subjects discussed.”\textsuperscript{58} Whatever was said, by late December, 1932, Bullitt himself believed that he was rapidly becoming one of Roosevelt's principal foreign policy advisers,\textsuperscript{59} possibly a future Assistant Secretary in the State Department.\textsuperscript{60} Moreover, Bullitt had gone to Europe with Roosevelt's full knowledge and with a

\textsuperscript{55} New York Times, Dec. 21, 1932.
\textsuperscript{56} Clapper Diaries, Dec. 22, 1932.
\textsuperscript{57} New York Times, Jan. 28, 1933.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., Jan. 26, 1933.
\textsuperscript{59} Wehle, Hidden Threads of History, passim.
\textsuperscript{60} In April, 1933, Bullitt thanked Roosevelt for the latter's “assurance” that Bullitt would become an “assistant secretary of State,” William C. Bullitt to Roosevelt, Apr. 10, 1933, President's Personal File, 1124. Bullitt never became an Assistant Secretary, but he did become an Assistant to the Secretary and later Ambassador to the Soviet Union.
clear idea of what he was to do. He did discuss not only debts but other matters with heads of government and with foreign secretaries; he did send reports to the President-elect in coded cablegrams; and he and FDR were both apparently so well aware of the embarrassing implications of their actions that they made every effort to cover up their relationship. In view of all this, it is difficult to describe Bullitt other than as Roosevelt's emissary, as the news stories of the time and the Senator from Indiana described him. In this respect Robinson stands vindicated.