

# Lesson: Major Battles & Events

## Primary Source Analysis

The following is a telegram from Walter Page, a US Ambassador to the United Kingdom during WWI, to US Secretary of State Robert Lansing. The British had intercepted and decoded a telegram from German Foreign Secretary Arthur Zimmermann to the German Ambassador in Mexico.

\*Retrieved from the National Archives Catalog: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/302022> (Accessed August 27, 2016.)

**TELEGRAM RECEIVED. SPECIAL GREEN.**

CLASSIFICATION CANCELED  
Authority: letter 1-6-58  
W. H. Anderson, State Dept.  
By: *Mark A. Eckhoff, Assistant*  
Date: *Oct 22, 1958*

FROM London,  
Dated Feb. 24, 1917,  
Rec'd 8:30 p. m.

SECRETARY OF STATE,  
Washington.

5747, February 24, 1 p. m.  
723-1417/8-204  
My fifty-seven forty-six, February 24, 8 a. m.

**CONFIDENTIAL** - FOR THE PRESIDENT AND THE SECRETARY OF STATE.

Balfour has handed me the text of a cipher telegram from Zimmermann, German Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to the German Minister to Mexico, which was sent via Washington and relayed by Bernstorff on January nineteenth. You can probably obtain a copy of the text relayed by Bernstorff from the cable office in Washington. The first group is the number of the telegram, one hundred and thirty, and the second is thirteen thousand and forty-two, indicating the number of the code used. The last group but two is ninety-seven thousand five hundred and fifty-six, which is Zimmermann's signature. I shall send you by mail a copy of the cipher text and of the de-code into German and meanwhile I give you the English translation as follows:

"We

*Handwritten: 8622021958*

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FROM 2nd from London # 5747.

"We intend to begin on the first of February unrestricted submarine warfare. We shall endeavor in spite of this to keep the United States of America neutral. In the event of this not succeeding, we make Mexico a proposal of alliance on the following basis: make war together, make peace together, generous financial support and an understanding on our part that Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. The settlement in detail is left to you. You will inform the President of the above most secretly as soon as the outbreak of war with the United States of America is certain and add the suggestion that he should, on his own initiative, ~~invite~~ *invite* Japan to immediate adherence and at the same time mediate between Japan and ourselves. Please call the President's attention to the fact that the ruthless employment of our submarines now offers the prospect of compelling England in a few months to make peace." Signed, ZIMMERMANN.

The receipt of this information has so greatly exercised the British Government that they have lost no time in communicating it to me to transmit to you, in order that our Government may be able without delay to make such disposition as may

Complete the Document Analysis using this telegram. Carefully read the text.

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FROM 3rd from London # 5747.

may be necessary in view of the threatened invasion of our territory.

The following paragraph is strictly confidential.

Early in the war, the British Government obtained possession of a copy of the German cipher code used in the above message and have made it their business to obtain copies of Bernstorff's cipher telegrams to Mexico, amongst others, which are sent back to London and deciphered here. This accounts for their being able to decipher this telegram from the German Government to their representative in Mexico and also for the delay from January nineteenth until now in their receiving the information. This system has hitherto been a jealously guarded secret and is only divulged now to you by the British Government in view of the extraordinary circumstances and their friendly feeling towards the United States. They earnestly request that you will keep the source of your information and the British Government's method of obtaining it profoundly secret but they put no prohibition on the publication of Zimmermann's telegram itself.

The copies of this and other telegrams were not obtained in Washington but were bought in Mexico.

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**TELEGRAM RECEIVED.**

FROM 4th from London #5747.

I have thanked Balfour for the service his Government has rendered us and suggest that a private official message of thanks from our Government to him would be beneficial.

I am informed that this information has not yet been given to the Japanese Government but I think it not unlikely that when it reaches them they may make a public statement on it in order to clear up their position regarding the United States and prove their good faith to their allies.

PAGE .

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