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Harry Hopkins, Soviet agent

JANUARY 4 — As a law student in the late 1940s, I became fascinated with the revelations of Communist penetration of American society, including Soviet espionage against the U.S. government. The sworn testimony of former spy couriers Whittaker Chambers and Elizabeth Bentley made it plain — at least to me — that hundreds of highly placed American citizens had betrayed their country to advance the cause and ultimate victory of the Soviet Union.

THAT CONVICTION, which was shared by millions of my fellow Americans, resulted in the ferocious controversy that divided the country for more than a decade after the end of World War II, as the Cold War began. As the situation escalated with the conviction of Alger Hiss, president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, for perjury in denying that he had been a Soviet spy, the battle seemed to sway in our favor. But the liberals, dreading the charge that they had ignored the peril, counterattacked, turning Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy into an all-purpose villain who allegedly smeared innocent victims with groundless charges of Communism or pro-Communism, and gradually the tide turned. By the end of the 1950s the battle was over, and it seemed clear that the “anti-anti-Communists” had won.

What no one but a few intelligence professionals knew was that in the early 1940s our government had recorded thousands of coded messages from Soviet agents in Washington and New York to their Moscow superiors, and in the ensuing years they had managed to

decode many of them. These messages clearly demonstrated that our side in the great controversy was right. Alger Hiss had indeed been a Soviet spy, as charged. So had Julius Rosenberg and scores of others.

Yet for reasons still not explained, this enormously important information

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was withheld from the American public until a few short years ago, when Sen. Daniel Moynihan insisted that the damning documents be declassified. Under their code name, *The Venona Papers* are now available to everyone through the Library of Congress.

To read these dispatches from Moscow's top spies is to glimpse the scope and success of their efforts, and the priceless help they received from hundreds of American traitors. As a guide to them, one cannot do better than to read *The Venona Secrets* (Regnery 2000), a new book by Herbert Romerstein and the late Eric Breindel.

NEARLY 50 YEARS have passed since this controversy was at a boil, and at least 60 since Soviet espionage was at its peak, so it is hardly surprising that there are many millions of Americans to whom even the name Alger Hiss is utterly meaningless. But there are still many people alive who can remember when the chief confidant of President Franklin Roosevelt was a man named

Harry Hopkins. And they will be understandably astonished to learn that in a message dated May 29, 1943, Iskhak Akhmerov, the chief Soviet “illegal” agent in the United States at the time, referred to an Agent 19 who had reported on discussions between Roosevelt and Churchill in Washington at which the agent had been present. Only Harry Hopkins meets the requirements for this agent's identity. Small wonder that Akhmerov, in a lecture in Moscow in the early 1960s, identified Hopkins by name as “the most important of all Soviet wartime agents in the United States.”

It took 50 years to bludgeon Alger Hiss's defenders into admitting that this suave bureaucrat, who rose to be chief of the State Department's Office of Special Political Affairs, had actually been a Soviet agent all along. And it will probably take another 50 to force FDR's admirers to concede that their hero's closest confidant and advisor was yet another Soviet agent.

But the documents and the testimony are now on the public record, and they make it plain that those of us who sounded the warning about Soviet espionage and policy subversion 50 years ago didn't know the half of it.

THE VENONA SECRETS contains much else that will shock those too young to remember these ancient battles. And for those of us who do remember, it is comforting evidence that the truth, however belatedly, has a way of coming out.

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