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Onward to Paris

Allen dulles was late for a tennis game in the swiss capital of Bern. The twenty-four-year-old who would one day become America's master spy, the patriarch of the Central Intelligence Agency, had just arrived by train from the U.S. mission in Vienna to take up his new post, and he'd run into an old friend from his school days—a buxom Swiss lass who played quite a passable game of tennis. Now he was at the U.S. legation in the Hirschengraben seeing to his luggage and was just closing up the office when the phone rang. The caller identified himself as a Russian revolutionary who needed to speak immediately with someone at the legation. Dulles insisted it was quite impossible and to ring back on Monday. The caller insisted, urgency in his voice. Dulles refused, hung up abruptly, and went off to his tennis match. The next night, the Russian was sealed into a Swiss train with his comrades for the trip across Germany to the Finland Station in the Russian capital of Petrograd. The caller was Vladimir Ilyich Lenin.

How different might the world have been had he answered the call of the revolutionary rather than the call of the blonde, Dulles wondered barely two years later as he began packing his bags again, this time for Paris and the peace talks that were to mark his true debut on the world stage. Though Dulles never learned what was on Lenin's mind—he may simply have hoped to open a dialogue with the West—it's entirely

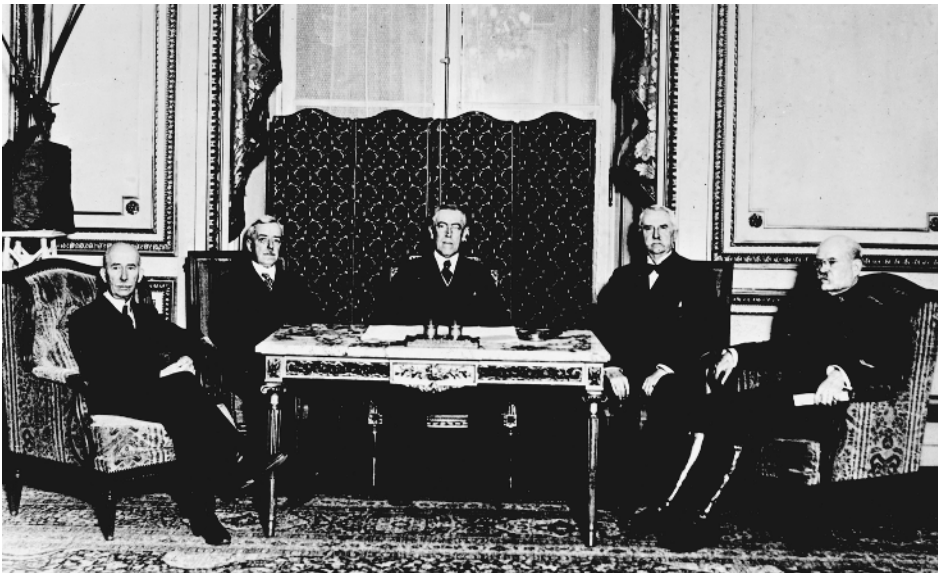
possible such an overture might have led to the young American staying in Switzerland. The venue of the talks had been moved to Paris from Lausanne after worker demonstrations, sparked by Lenin and his Bolshevik followers, erupted in Lausanne and across Switzerland.

Though Dulles was disappointed to be leaving Switzerland and a post where at his tender age he had managed to acquire some considerable responsibilities for a young diplomat, he was especially excited by this opportunity to play a role in shaping the future of the world—while at the same time serving alongside his beloved uncle, who happened to be the secretary of state of the United States—Robert Lansing. Still, he knew that he would not be alone since many young diplomats would be joining him, helping to establish the new world order.

A brilliant fifty-three-year-old army officer, Ralph Van Deman, had already built a unique intelligence service for the United States in the final years of the war. His next mission, as delegated by his boss, Army Chief of Staff General Tasker Howard Bliss, was simpler: to make certain that the American mission in Paris could do its work without any interference from the strange foreign manipulators who were arriving all around them with agendas far different from that of Woodrow Wilson. Or as Van Deman wrote in a memorandum to General Bliss:

> Persons known to hold disloyal sentiments and those of anarchist or terrorist tendencies should be denied admission to the buildings and constant and close supervision should be kept on all persons entering the buildings whose sentiments and affiliations were not known. . . . We must know what persons were admitted to the buildings, where they went in the buildings and when they left. Also, due to the unusual conditions following the long war, it was necessary to assure ourselves as far as possible that no evil intended [*sic*] persons were allowed to loaf about the entrances of the buildings.

Nearly seventy intelligence police were assigned to assure Van Deman that his direct orders would be carried out to the letter. The profound mistrust of foreigners, friends and foes alike, was but a foretaste of the kind of reception the new world order—and America's place in it—would receive back home. Ultimately, this national attitude would keep the U.S. isolated with little understanding of the forces set so powerfully in motion—until it was too late.



The senior U.S. delegation in Paris (from left to right): Wilson adviser Colonel Edward M. House, Secretary of State Robert Lansing, President Woodrow Wilson, Henry D. White (a retired diplomat and the only Republican), and General Tasker H. Bliss, U.S. Army chief of staff.

By the time the first American delegates began arriving at the posh Hotel Crillon, platoons of marines were already unpacking cases beneath the brilliant chandeliers of the building requisitioned by Van Deman as the headquarters, caravansary, cafeteria, and social gathering place of the U.S. delegation. An army lieutenant, once manager of New York's Vanderbilt Hotel, had been assigned to run the accommodations under the intelligence chief's supervision.

Van Deman, a Harvard graduate of the nineteenth century, was fully prepared for the arrival in Paris of the next generation of Ivy Leaguers whom Wilson and his top aide Colonel Edward House had organized to prepare the U.S. delegation for its role, as they saw it, of reshaping the world. This largely patrician bunch of researchers, historians, economists, and all varieties of political thinkers, was called the Inquiry. It included a twenty-eight-year-old Harvard-trained journalist and political philosopher named Walter Lippmann; the Harvard historian Samuel Eliot Morrison, to redraw Slavic Eastern Europe; Charles Seymour, the thirty-three-year-old alumnus of Choate and Harvard, to parcel out the remnants of the Hapsburg Empire; and the cartographer Isaiah Bowman

to draw the maps that would ultimately define the nature of the postwar world.

This super-secret group, which ultimately numbered 126 researchers drawn largely from Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, and the University of Chicago, produced more than a thousand reports of problems that these academics believed might be encountered by the peacemakers in Paris. The early meetings took place at the New York Public Library. Yet apart from its masterful maps, most of its work was decidedly amateurish. Its ten-member Middle Eastern group, operating out of Princeton, contained no specialists in contemporary affairs in the region. It was chaired by a scholar of the Crusades whose son, also a member, was a specialist in Latin American studies—a subject far removed from Arabia. The Arab group's members included experts on the American Indian, an engineer, and two Persian-language instructors. Often the reports did little more than repeat summaries from encyclopedias the Inquiry members found in the public library. The Middle Eastern report failed even to mention that there might be any deposits of the petroleum which, with the era of mechanized warfare already dawning, would be of enormous strategic value to any nation that controlled them.

So it was not too surprising that by the time the group arrived in Paris, Lippmann, who ran the Inquiry with Bowman, wanted more. He had already uncovered the brilliant intelligence reports of Allen Dulles that were being passed back through diplomatic channels to the State Department. Dulles had been quickly sucked up into the mix—crossing, mostly deftly, the artificial boundaries between diplomacy, intelligence, and academe. He was already installed in Paris when Wilson's private train, carrying him from the harbor of Brest where his ship had docked to great fanfare, arrived in Paris to a hero's welcome. The young American diplomat had been involved in many of the arrival arrangements—from the red carpet welcome by Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau to the ride in an open carriage down the Champs-Élysées to the Place de la Concorde and the doors of the Crillon. Crowds swarmed the streets, all but choking the grand plaza in front of the hotel, youths hanging off lampposts, waving American flags. The savior of Europe, and especially of France, had arrived to remake a new world. And the French, of course, expected to be at its epicenter. These moments, as Dulles was to discover, were the peak of the excitement. For Wilson and the rest of the U.S. delegation, it was only downhill from there.

At first Dulles was delegated to his uncle, who would be increasingly marginalized but, by virtue of his official position as secretary of state, occupied a palatial suite with twelve-foot ceilings at the end of a corridor guarded by two marine sergeants and looking out over the Place de la Concorde. The less fortunate found themselves in more ramshackle rooms in an adjacent wing that stretched out toward Maxim's restaurant on the backside. Some of the younger and more carefree of the diplomats and support personnel quickly discovered one advantage to these quarters. It seemed the building was connected through a trap door at the rear to the second floor of Maxim's, whose gilded front entrance was around the corner on the Rue Royale. This celebrated restaurant boasted several private rooms on the second floor long used for trysts by the wealthy and famous.

Van Deman spotted this obvious security loophole on December 4, 1918, before the bulk of the U.S. delegation began to arrive, and would have none of it. "I ordered a padlock placed on the trap door and the keys thereof placed in the charge of a sergeant reported to be entirely reliable," Van Deman reported to his commanding officer, General Bliss. But two weeks later, he discovered that the trap door "which had been padlocked was open. This made it necessary, of course, to again padlock the door and remove the keys from the custody of the sergeant, which was done." As Harold Nicolson observed to his smug delight, however, somehow Van Deman's most valiant and persistent efforts failed to prevent traffic, which eventually proceeded quite regularly between the U.S. delegation and the evening entertainment on the other side.

Dulles was quick to discover that the real work of the conference and the U.S. mission was proceeding not in his uncle's palatial suite but in the more modest quarters of Colonel House and members of the Inquiry. Eventually Dulles and Seymour, two young patricians, gravitated toward each other. Seymour appreciated the pedigree and intelligence, as well as the accomplishments, of the young Princeton-educated diplomat who had already managed to acquire a deep understanding of the complex politics and diplomacy of the regions he was delegated to oversee. Dulles understood the power that together they could wield, both in the negotiations that were just getting under way and in the fledgling nations they were effectively to rule—at least for their months in Paris—and to shape for a century. Dulles and Seymour played key roles in redrawing the map of central Europe and the Balkans, a map

that was to cause untold problems from World War II through the bitter ethnic battles of Kosovo. But they were not to operate alone. Alongside them in their endeavors was a young Brit of equally impeccable academic credentials—and bloodlines. His name was Harold Nicolson.

When the armistice was announced on November 11, 1918, Nicolson was already preparing for the Peace Conference in the basement of the British Foreign Office in Whitehall. He had an impeccable diplomatic background. He was born in Tehran, where his father, Sir Arthur Nicolson, was serving as British ambassador. With the outbreak of the war, Sir Arthur and family had returned to London, where he had taken up his post as permanent undersecretary of the Foreign Office—the principal British officer of the nation's diplomatic corps. By the time of the armistice, his son was already well up the ladder of his own success.

Young Harold's immediate focus was on the Strumnitza enclave—an obscure corner of Serbia that had been in dispute throughout a series of Balkan wars. Nicolson was en route to the map room in the tower when he heard a loud commotion on the sidewalks below, looked down on Number 10 Downing Street, and saw a beaming David Lloyd George emerge to toast the crowds. "So the Germans had signed after all," Nicolson mused, returning, maps in hand, to his basement office and the Strumnitza dilemma. "When I again emerged, the whole of London had gone mad," he recalled in his memoirs.

A month later, Nicolson was strolling past the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields with the redoubtable editor of the *Observer*, James L. Garvin, and expounding as the cynical and worldly Garvin listened kindly. "We had no revengeful desire to subjugate and penalize our late enemies, but a fervent aspiration to create and fortify the new nations whom we regarded, with maternal instinct, as the justification of our sufferings and our victory," Nicolson explained, only a trifle condescending perhaps. Still, Garvin smiled indulgently. "Well, if that is the spirit in which you are all leaving for Paris, I am glad at heart," he replied.

Just a few days later, Nicolson was loading himself and his maps onto the eleven o'clock train, bound for Paris from the Charing Cross Station in company with another old college chum, Eustace Percy, and his beautiful young bride of one month, Stella Drummond. At Calais they boarded the train to Paris and lunched lavishly in the dining car,

thinking grand thoughts. After an extensive delay en route due to an accident on the rail line, where trains just crawled through the regions of northern France still devastated by the ravages of war, Nicolson and his entourage arrived finally at eleven o'clock at night in a brilliantly lit and, after the grim days of the war, newly gay Paris. Nicolson took a motorcar directly to the Avenue Kléber, dropping Percy and his bride at the sprawling ground-floor flat they had rented not far away at 72 Avenue d'Iéna. Arriving at the British compound, he found the delegation ensconced in two lavish hotels: the Majestic, fronting on the Avenue Kléber, and just behind, the Astoria—both a few blocks from the Étoile and the Arc de Triomphe.

The Majestic, festooned with onyx to the delight of the wealthy Brazilian women who had camped there on their regular prewar shopping trips to Paris, and the Astoria have had a checkered and ironic history in the days since Nicolson and the British and Commonwealth delegations arrived to negotiate the peace. A quarter century later, the Majestic was to become a headquarters of the feared Gestapo; as one French diplomat once whispered to me, screams could often be heard in the 1940s from the basement torture chambers where enemies of the Reich were worked over. The irony was that in this same basement, the British delegation had held their weekly soirées and Nicolson had invited some of his colleagues and best friends, Dulles included.

For these brilliant young swells, Paris 1919 was really little more than a continuation of life in the common rooms and the colleges of Oxford or Harvard, Cambridge or Yale. There were 207 British and Commonwealth personnel divided between the two buildings—a far cry from the 17 whom Lord Castlereagh had brought to the Congress of Vienna, which had set the course of the civilized world for the balance of the nineteenth century, as Versailles was to do for the twentieth century. In the dining room, female staff from some of the better English provincial hotels, "under the direction of a chaperone," Nicolson pointed out, served up the same sort of Anglo-Swiss swill that was available in some of the better Pall Mall men's clubs, "while coffee was British to the core."

Scotland Yard's Sir Basil Thompson organized security along the lines of Van Deman's plans at the Crillon—to the extent that it was quite easy to leave the Majestic compound though all but impossible to get in, even for rulers of the new nation-states of Central Europe, not to mention the detritus of the Hapsburg Empire, the petty diplomats and

scheming politicians of the Balkans, and the exotic potentates of Arabia, India, China, and Japan. Many were subjected to unspeakable indignities, often detained by force of arms for daring to cross the doorstep, even on invitation of British diplomats. The attitude quickly became apparent. Such delegates were little more than curiosities—lab experiments or curious butterflies to be captured, pinned to a velvet cushion, then carefully examined and finally filed away and catalogued with little thought to the consequences for the environment left behind. All this despite the best of intentions of Nicolson and his young Oxbridge chums and their parallel numbers they found on the U.S. delegation. "We were hampered by the atmosphere of Paris," young Charles Seymour recalled to Nicolson. Nicolson himself took an even more antiseptic view of it all, though: "We felt like surgeons operating in the ballroom with the aunts of the patient gathered all around."

The fact is that Paris, indeed much of France, was still licking its wounds, as were many peoples in the most remote corners of the world for which the peace conference was a powerful attraction—promising freedom and new beginnings. It seems they all descended on the French capital.

One of these was an obscure Indochinese busboy and photo retoucher named Nguyen Tat Thanh. A young man of fierce determination and passion for his homeland, Thanh had been in the French capital for nearly a year when Paris went wild for the armistice. While Dulles was moving into the plush Crillon and Nicolson was installing himself in the Majestic, Thanh was living in a run-down residential hotel in Montmartre. Indeed, much of his life in the West had paralleled that of Nicolson, Dulles, and their crowd—but very much in a curious upstairs-downstairs fashion. While Nicolson was finishing his schooling at Balliol College, Oxford, and Dulles was winding up his days at Harvard, Thanh was leaving behind the mandarinate into which he had been born in Annam, son of a brilliant scholar in the service of the emperor. At the time Annam, or Cochin China, was engaged in a frantic intellectual struggle to maintain its independence—physical, cultural, and political—from its enormous neighbor to the north, China, and at the same time from the colonial French overlords who wanted little more from this strange, lush, far-off land than the riches they could extract in rubber and rice, of which it was the world's third largest exporter. Like many of those gathering in Paris, Thanh was deeply

committed to the independence and self-determination of his homeland, later to be known as Vietnam.

Thanh was not alone in believing that the contributions his people had made to the Allied victory, and Wilson's pledge of self-determination for all the world's oppressed or enslaved, entitled them to special consideration as the West gathered in Paris. Feisal ibn Hussein—son of Emir Ali ibn Hussein, the powerful sherif of Mecca, king of the Hejaz—commanded Bedouin legions that had been placed at the disposal of the Allies against the Ottoman allies of Germany. At his side was Colonel T. E. Lawrence, the official liaison between Feisal and General Sir Edmund Allenby, commander in chief of British forces in the Middle East—but unofficially Feisal's self-styled "guide, philosopher and friend." Lawrence of Arabia, as he came to be known, if not Feisal, recognized the difficult path that lay before them. First there was the military issue of just how central Lawrence and Feisal had really been to the Allied victory. Then there was a host of political and diplomatic reasons tied to a division of the spoils of the region among the Western powers. Feisal and Lawrence both were products of the aristocracy of their own nations—as schooled in the patrician manners of the well-born as Dulles, Nicolson, or any of the young Ivy or Oxbridge swells who would face them across the conference tables in Paris. The two battle-tested leaders from Arabia came to these tables braced with a background of steel, shot, and powder that none of their opposite numbers could boast. Yet absent the veneer of diplomatic refinement their demands were no less insistent, their needs no less imperative, and the consequences of their failures no less profound.

From Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans, other equally insistent national leaders also converged on the Peace Conference. Edvard Beneš, the brilliant thirty-four-year-old foreign minister of the would-be nation of Czechoslovakia, was entrusted by President Tomáš Masaryk to represent a free Czechoslovak state in Paris. Poland was blessed with a national treasure. Ignace Paderewski, perhaps the world's greatest living pianist, spent the war years thrilling audiences throughout the United States, building a reservoir of goodwill that was reinforced by four million expatriate Poles who formed the largest single Polish community outside Warsaw. By the time the delegates began assembling in Paris, vast numbers of this multitude had also decided to gather there, each pressing his own personal agenda. These included such disparate

individuals as a doctor from the ski resort of Zakopane in the Tatra Mountains that straddle the Czech frontier along with a dozen of his advisers, and Roman Dmowski, a brilliant Polish chemist who relinquished the life of a scientist in an effort to shape the future of a free Poland. Dmowski wound up in perpetual confrontation with Józef Pilsudski, a revolutionary and field marshal who happened to be installed at the moment in Warsaw as the self-appointed president of the nation.

And from the Balkans, that remote and violent stew pot of southeastern Europe, came a host of dark political figures. The intrigues of this region, indeed, had launched the world into war five years earlier in the city of Sarajevo where the Hapsburg crown prince had been assassinated, providing just the excuse the Central Powers needed to open hostilities. Each wanted peace on his own terms, the populations of their neighbors be hanged—perhaps literally. As the American negotiator Stephen Bonsal put it, "They came as suppliants, it is true, but not on bended knee."

Though the focus of the large nations remained firmly on the new shape of Europe, the fate of the smaller members proved often to be a mere afterthought. But there were still many other delegates gathering from the four corners of the world—especially Asia. From Japan came Foreign Minister Baron Nobuaki Makino and ambassador to Britain Viscount Sutemi Chinda, and both ultimately kowtowed to the dark eminence, Prince Kimmochi Saionji, member of the ruling royal family. Known as the last genro, one of the great lords who westernized Japan during the Meiji Restoration, Saionji pulled all the strings yet rarely emerged from a self-imposed hermetic existence deep within a sumptuous apartment near the Parc Monceau. The rest of the delegation installed themselves comfortably in the Hotel Bristol on the fashionable Faubourg Saint-Honoré, just blocks from the Hotel Crillon. Their goal was a simple one: to preserve and expand Japanese hegemony in Asia, to continue its political, military, and economic dominance in the region. And all this would have to be done with the least cost to the purse or the resources of the nation.

But they ran up against a formidable opponent in Paris. For China, too, had sent a remarkable collection of negotiators who had spent the war years cultivating relationships and goodwill in Washington that were to serve them well. The public faces of the delegation were Alfred Sze, ambassador to London, and V. K. Wellington Koo, the thirty-two-

year-old ambassador to Washington who had so ingratiated himself with Wilson that the American president invited him along on the *George Washington* on the trip to Paris. Koo and his sixty fellow members of the Chinese delegation moved in across the river at the plush Hotel Lutetia Concorde on the Boulevard Raspail, just steps from the French ministries where the fate of their nation was debated during those months of negotiations. Their goals were equally ambitious—to contain the spread of Japan that had begun with its victory over China in 1895, and to win back control of vast areas of their own country that had been stolen by Western nations at the time they were carving it up into "spheres of influence" in the last century.

Korea was another nation with a big beef to pick with Japan, whose overwhelming military force had annexed the poor mainland country, forcing the emperor of Korea, also a vassal of the Qing rulers of China, to cede his country to the Japanese. They had been ruling it with an iron fist for a decade before the delegates began gathering in Paris. Now the sorry little delegation it managed to assemble in Paris sought its freedom, to the chagrin of much of the West, which appeared to be doing its best to appease Japan—Asia's most powerful, and at least not overtly anti-European, nation.

Ahead of all of these diplomats who made their way to Paris, each accompanied by hundreds of advisers, aides, and assorted hangers-on, lay months of frenetic bargaining, manipulation, and inevitably pleasure and abandon. The result for most was disappointing failure and decades of unrest and turmoil as they scrambled, battled, and manipulated to remake their corner of the world to their own liking. Some yearned for what the new world order might do for them, while others feared what the new order might hold for millions of their countrymen. Many of these men, and occasionally women, were to play an enormous role in the history of the twentieth century that was to be written—a future shaped, as we shall see, by disappointment and disillusionment, dismissals and denials that met them from their first days in Paris.