

World War I

Primary Source

The Zimmerman Telegram

On January 16, 1917, German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmermann sent a telegram to the German ambassador in Mexico. The telegram was intercepted by the British and shown to President Wilson a little over a month later. Five days after that, the telegram was released to the American press.

Directions: Read the text of the telegram below. Then answer the questions that follow.

Most Secret

For Your Excellency's personal information and to be handed on to the Imperial Minister in Mexico

We intend to begin unrestricted submarine warfare on the first of February. We shall endeavor in spite of this to keep the United States neutral. In the event of this not succeeding [that is, in the event the United States does declare war], we make Mexico a proposal of an 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 detail is left to you.

You will inform the President [of Mexico] of the above most secretly as soon as the outbreak of war with the United States is certain and add the suggestion that he should, on his own initiative, invite Japan to immediate adherence and at the same time mediate between Japan and ourselves.

Please call the [Mexican] President's attention to the fact that the unrestricted employment of our submarines now offers the prospect of compelling England to make peace within a few months. Acknowledge receipt.

Zimmermann

1. What do you think was the American public reaction to this telegram, and why?

2. Why do you think it was decided to make the telegram public?

3. **Draw Conclusions** Why did Zimmermann make the offer to Mexico conditional on the United States' going to war against Germany?
