

those interested in the Hiss case. The cable describes a “chat” with a Soviet agent, code-named “ALES,” who (according to the text) “has been working with the NEIGHBORS continuously since 1935.” “The NEIGHBORS,” in NKVD agent parlance, traditionally referred to the GRU.

From the message, it is evident that “ALES” had been a trusted agent, “leader of a small group of the NEIGHBORS’s probationers, for the most part consisting of his relations.” Whether Priscilla and/or Donald Hiss were among “his relations” cannot be determined from the cable itself. “ALES” and his group (according to “VADIM”) “work on obtaining military information only. Materials on the ‘BANK’ [i.e., the State Department], where “ALES” evidently worked allegedly interest the NEIGHBORS very little and he does not produce them regularly.” Moreover, “all the last few years ‘ALES’ has been working with ‘POL’ [also identified as “PAUL”] who also meets other members of the group occasionally.”

The CIA and NSA considered “POL” an “unidentified cover-name.” Most likely, the alias referred to a U.S. government official who led a major Soviet espionage ring within the U.S. government during these years—identified as such throughout the VENONA traffic and in the existing secondary literature—Nathan Gregory Silvermaster, whom his Soviet overseers called “PAL.” (The author’s research in KGB files for his book on Soviet espionage in the United States, *The Haunted Wood*, confirms Silvermaster’s alias, “PAL,” used throughout this period.)

The cable’s concluding comments retain the capacity to startle even today:

5. Recently ALES and his whole group were awarded Soviet decorations.
6. After the YALTA Conference, when he [ALES] had gone on to MOSCOW, a Soviet personage in a very responsible position (ALES gave [us] to understand that it was Comrade VYSHINSKIJ) allegedly got in touch with ALES and at the behest of the Military NEIGHBORS passed on to him their gratitude and so on.

VADIM

“Comrade Vyshinskij” referred to the then-foreign minister of the Soviet Union.

We know—and have reviewed details of this episode in connection with “ALES” elsewhere in the book—that Alger Hiss attended the 1945 Yalta Conference as an adviser to then-Secretary of State Edward J. Stettinius. After the conference, Hiss and Stettinius and two lesser State Department functionaries flew on Stettinius’s plane back to the United States, stopping at various cities, including Moscow, where Stettinius held official meetings.

in the absence of firsthand accounts or documents.

A convergence of collateral evidence, however, supports the presumption that Alger Hiss was “ALES.” How else to account for Oleg Gordievsky’s identification in 1988, over a half-decade before the decoded VENONA cable was made public, of Hiss’s Soviet alias as “ALES”? How else do we explain why Soviet code clerk Igor Gouzenko, in debriefings with the Canadian prime minister and that country’s intelligence officials after his 1945 defection in Ottawa, asserted that he had been told by a Soviet military attaché that the GRU had an agent who was an assistant to a leading State Department official, an individual whom Prime Minister Mackenzie King and others warned U.S. officials later that year was undoubtedly Alger Hiss? KGB files cited elsewhere in this book, moreover, reveal additional discussions by “RUBLE,” another alleged Soviet agent in the United States, with “ALES” and reinforce the probability that Alger Hiss was the individual in question.

A brief flurry of debate over the “ALES” identification absorbed the American media after Cable Number 1822 was released.<sup>15</sup> In the absence of further materials regarding “ALES,” however, that agent’s identification as Hiss remains persuasive but not conclusive. But this single document does not alter the extensive underlying fabric of evidence outlined throughout this book, which demonstrates the credibility of Chambers’s charges against Hiss and the latter’s culpability as a Soviet agent. If accurate, the “ALES” identification proves that Hiss not only worked for the Soviets from 1935 to 1938, when Chambers defected, but that he remained a valued agent through 1945, during his period as a leading State Department policymaker. In the war years, Hiss had access to the widest range of Roosevelt administration secrets and policy decisions.

Strangely, the media and others interested in the Hiss-Chambers case neglected a *second* VENONA cable that mentions Alger Hiss directly though obliquely. In a September 28, 1943, dispatch to Moscow from “MOLIERE” (identified in VENONA notes as Pavel P. Mikhajlov, Soviet vice-consul in New York), the following information is conveyed in a cable, most of which could not be decoded: “2. The NEIGHBOR [i.e., military intelligence or GRU] has reported that [words unrecovered] from the State Department by the name of HISS . . . [end of recovered wording].” Why a GRU agent mentioned Hiss to the Soviet vice-consul in New York in 1943 will remain a mystery in the absence of a more fully deciphered cable.