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***The Origins, Use and Development
of Hot Line Diplomacy***

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the origins, use and development of hot lines as a means of communication in diplomatic crises. Using primary material it describes the initial decision of the United States and the Soviet Union to establish a hot line and British attempts to become a third partner to the deal. A number of subsequent examples of the hot line in use are also discussed, most notably the superpower hot line dialogue during the Arab-Israeli war of June 1967. The various rationales and purposes of hot lines are analysed and it is argued that since 1962 they have increasingly been valued for the prestige they bring to diplomatic actors rather than for their utility in crisis situations.

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THE ORIGINS, USE AND DEVELOPMENT OF HOT LINE DIPLOMACY

Haraldur Þór Egilsson

Introduction

The need for reliable and swift communications between governments has always been essential. This need intensified during the nuclear age and was dangerously apparent during the Cuban missiles crisis. To improve emergency communication with the intention to lessen the risk of war breaking out accidentally, by misunderstanding or miscalculation the superpowers created a hot line. A hot line is a direct communication link between heads of governments used to prevent a crisis from escalating into armed conflict. A direct communication link on the other hand is not confined to acute situations and therefore does not confer the same sense of urgency as the hot line.

The hot line is one of the lasting images of the Cold War. Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* and other films have formed people's conception of it. Some of the generally accepted knowledge about the hot line is erroneously based on its popular image. The aim of this paper is to outline the technical, diplomatic and political aspects of the hotline and examine whether the importance of hot lines has shifted from being a purely practical means of emergency communication to being used to symbolise the state of bilateral relations.

Origins of the Hot Line

The idea of establishing a direct communication link between Moscow and Washington can be traced to the late 1950s. Professor Thomas Schelling proposed the idea in his writings as early as 1958, and a group of American scientists suggested it to Nikita Khrushchev when he visited the United States in 1959. In 1960 Gerard C. Smith, a member of the Policy Planning Council of the State Department proposed that a hot line should be established. Although the idea was not pursued for the time being the Council continued to, as President John F. Kennedy put it, 'persistently advance on appropriate

occasions' such a communication link. This was also discussed at a similar time in the media, for example in *Parade* magazine.¹ Before the 1961 Vienna summit between Kennedy and Khrushchev the State Department suggested that the President should pursue the interest the Chairman had shown in a "white telephone" between the United States President and himself ...²

The superpowers continued exploring the mutual interest in establishing a direct communication link between them both publicly and informally. Khrushchev's interest was confirmed early in 1962 in meetings between Pierre Salinger, President Kennedy's Press Secretary, and Mikhail Khalarmov, Chief of the Press Division of the Soviet Foreign Ministry. The Soviets even proposed early technical discussions.³ At the Geneva Disarmament Conference on April 18 1962 the US proposed improving communications by establishing reliable links between heads of government. A month later the Soviet draft Treaty echoed these proposals.⁴ The matter was however stuck in the trenches of the Cold War. It continued to be tossed back and forth between the superpowers. In discussions with the Japanese Fisheries Minister in May 1962, Khrushchev openly stated his opinion that a direct line should be established between him and President Kennedy in case things went wrong. And they nearly did.⁵

It was the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 which paved the way for establishing such a link. At critical moments during those fateful days the time to exchange messages through diplomatic channels, which included coding, decoding, translation, transmission and delivery, took not minutes but hours. Vital messages from Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet Ambassador in Washington, to the Kremlin were coded by hand:

Then we called Western Union. The telegraph agency would send a messenger to collect the cable. Usually it was the same young black man, who came to the embassy on a bicycle. But after he pedalled away with my urgent cable, we at the embassy could only pray that he would

¹ G. C. Smith, *Disarming Diplomat. The Memoirs of Gerard C. Smith, Arms Control Negotiator*. (New York: Madison Books 1996) p. 107-108.

² *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*. Volume V, Soviet Union. Editors Charles S. Sampson, John Michael Joyce, General Editor David S. Patterson. (Washington: United States Government Printing Office 1998) p. 161-162.

³ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*. Volume V, p. 362-363, 365.

⁴ <http://www.fas.org/nuke/control/hotline/intro.htm>. Hot line Agreements. 24.09.2002.

⁵ PRO PREM 11/5080 April 19.1963.

take it to the Western Union office without delay and not stop to chat on the way with some girl!⁶

This led both sides to use public broadcasts to convey messages to each other.

At great speed, with sirens shrieking, a motorcade headed by Khrushchev's assistant raced off from Khrushchev's dacha to the radio station, where the message to President Kennedy was broadcast at once. It was from this broadcast that I myself heard Khrushchev's full reply, not by the cable with the text that arrived at the embassy via Western Union two hours later.⁷

Not only was this time consuming but the public knowledge of how things stood and each adversary's conditions made it more difficult to resolve. This method of communications clearly was not ideal and improvements were necessary. The origin of the crisis was Khrushchev's miscalculation of American reactions. The crisis made it evident that secure, reliable and swift communications were vital.

The reaction came soon after the Cuban incident was resolved. On December 12 1962 the U.S. submitted a Working Paper at the Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Committee in Geneva which included a proposal for a direct communications link. The Americans wanted to take steps to prevent war by accident, miscalculation or failure of communication.⁸

The technology and techniques of modern warfare are such that much reliance is inevitably placed on the ability to respond rapidly and effectively to hostile military action. Events which may occur in connexion with the efforts of one state to maintain its readiness to respond to such action may, in varying degrees and with varying consequences, be misconstrued by another. The initiating state may have underestimated the ambiguity of such events and may have miscalculated the response they would call forth.⁹

⁶ A. Dobrynin, *In Confidence. Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents (1962-1986)*. (New York: Times Books 1995) p. 96.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 97.

⁸ G. T. Seaborg, *Kennedy, Khrushchev and the Test Ban*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press 1981) p. 206-207.

⁹ *UN Docs*, Disarmament Commission (DCOR) ENDC 70 12. December 1962. United States: Working Paper on reduction of the risk of war through accident, miscalculation, or failure of communication. p. 1-13.

Misunderstanding and miscalculation was even more dangerous in times of crisis. The American proposal questioned the effectiveness of communication available in times of serious military crisis and called for new measures.¹⁰

When the conference continued on April 5 1963 Semyon K. Tsarapkin, head of the Soviet delegation, announced that the Soviet Union was willing to 'accept at once direct telephone or teletype communications between Heads of Government.'¹¹ After this step had been taken discussions proceeded swiftly.¹² They started in the first week of May and on June 20 1963 an agreement, *Memorandum of Understanding regarding the establishment of a direct communication link*, was signed in Geneva between the United States and the Soviet Union establishing a direct emergency communications link.¹³ The hot line was installed on August 30 1963.¹⁴ Agreeing the need for a direct communication link was only part of the task. What kind of a hot line, who and when to use it were important questions which had to be resolved.

Technical and Practical Aspects of the Hot Line

One of the lasting myths surrounding the hot line is that it consists of a telephone link. This was considered by both superpowers but there were strong arguments against using a telephone connection.¹⁵ All parties concerned preferred a teletype link.¹⁶ The U.S. 1962 Working Paper

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 10.

¹¹ PRO PREM 11/5080 Prime Minister PM/63/55 April 11. 1963. See also Glenn T. Seaborg, *Kennedy, Khrushchev and the Test Ban*. p. 206-207.

¹² PRO FO 371/171141 Emergency Communications Between Heads of Government May 3. 1963. The negotiations were conducted by technical experts.

¹³ PRO FO 371/171143 The Hot Line August 1. 1963.

¹⁴ L. B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point. Perspectives of the Presidency 1963-1969*. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1972) p. 287.

¹⁵ PRO FO 371/171140 Minutes January 8. 1963. PRO PREM 11/5080 Prime Minister PM/63/55 April 11. 1963. PRO FO 371/171140 IAD 1051/13/9 Emergency Communications. The Americans asked the British General Post Office for quotations for both speech and teletype facilities. See PRO PREM 11/5080 April 19.1963. Before the Geneva summit in 1961 the Americans were contemplating using a direct telephone connection between the State Department and the U.S. embassy in Moscow. See *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*. Volume V, p. 161-162.

¹⁶ PRO FO 371/171140 IA D1051/3 Measures to reduce the risk of war. Comments on the draft speech prepared by the U.K. Delegation. [Memorandum made by the FO and MOD on the draft speech.]

recommended using such a system because voice telephone or radio was not sufficiently reliable until communications satellites became available. The Americans pointed out that a teletype system on a reserved line could have dual capabilities and be used for voice communication as well should that prove desirable.¹⁷ The superpowers agreed to a land line teletype link routed through Moscow-Helsinki-Stockholm-London-Washington.¹⁸ Even when the hot line was subsequently modified and upgraded speech facilities were not added. Nevertheless, the image of the hot line as a telephone has prevailed. This misunderstanding is not confined to the public. When it was suggested in the State Department in 1983 that speech facilities should be added to the hot line many officials believed it already was a telephone as seen in the movies.¹⁹

It is not difficult to imagine why this myth has persisted. The telephone is the fastest and most common communication link and has proved itself an important tool of diplomacy since the 1950s, when phone services were made more reliable by the introduction of submarine cables. Diplomatic communications were previously mostly confined to telegrams, which have continued to be the most important communications link of diplomacy.²⁰ With improved communications heads of government or ministers have the possibility to pick up a telephone and instantly or within minutes get their counterparts on the line. The idea of heads of state salvaging world peace by dialling a counterpart captures the imagination. But it is precisely the speed of this form of communication which makes it an unsuitable tool for crisis management.²¹

The argument against using a voice emergency communication link is both technical and political. The hot line was designed to be used in the gravest situations, which make exchanges over a hot line even more precarious if done by telephone. Telephone diplomacy can be a double-edged sword in communications between adversaries and is more suitable in relations between states on friendly terms. The U.S. 1962 Working Paper pointed out some of the serious disadvantages. It was more likely to lead to 'inadvertent

¹⁷ *UN Docs*, Disarmament Commission (DCOR) ENDC 70 12. December 1962. p. 10-11.

¹⁸ *PRO PREM* 11/5080 Telegram No. 156 From Geneva to Foreign Office April 22.1963.

¹⁹ S. Talbott, *Deadly Gambits. The Regan Administration and the Stalemate in Nuclear Arms Control*. (London: Pan Books 1985) p. 322-323.

²⁰ W. Dizard Jr., *Digital Diplomacy. U.S. Foreign Policy in the Information Age*. (London: Praeger 2001) p. 100-101.

²¹ *PRO FO* 371/171140 IA D1051/3 Measures to reduce the risk of war. Comments on the draft speech prepared by the U.K. Delegation. [Memorandum made by the FO and MOD on the draft speech.]

error either through lack of precision in reception or through incorrect translation.²² Misunderstanding because of these reasons or simply any ‘slip ups of the tongue or ill-considered statements’ will be easily mended or instantly forgiven by friends but can make relations even more strained in relations between hostile states.²³

From a practical point of view there was also the problem of translation. A vocal hot line required conversations to be translated instantaneously at both ends. Even though velocity of communication was of utmost importance in times of crisis accuracy in translation could not suffer because of it.²⁴ Using a telephone link could therefore increase the possibility of misunderstanding rather than eradicate it. Organising translation was no easy matter as was discovered when the London-Moscow hot line was discussed in 1966. Translators had to be on call 24 hours a day, which meant their residence had to be close to Whitehall. This led to discussion about getting two bachelors to live in a local flat or a hotel room.²⁵

The spontaneity of the telephone conversation makes it unpredictable and therefore impossible to script. In times of crisis people are under duress and pressure. Instantaneous and ill-considered remarks are dangerous. During conversations between heads of state in normal times this can be an advantage depending on the situation, topic and the person’s ability to think on his feet. However in times of crisis mistakes come at a high price and none higher than when there exists a risk of nuclear war. The words of a head of state carry most weight and are only retracted with much difficulty. Bilateral relations require well thought out messages and responses. The teletype minimises the risk of personal friction between heads of state. Exchanging written messages gives both parties time for reflection, to analyse and respond, even just to let off steam. The telephone does not allow this latitude but on the contrary compels a response of some sort, which can result in a misguided reply or misunderstood answer.

This does not mean that translation or interpretation of printed messages is always reliable. Carter’s attempt to use the hot line to bypass diplomatic channels to get straight to Brezhnev during the SALT-2 discussions proved disastrous. The KGB translators on duty were not highly qualified and

²² *UN Docs*, Disarmament Commission (DCOR) ENDC 70 12. December 1962 p. 10-11.

²³ G.R. Berridge, *Diplomacy. Theory and Practice*. Second Edition. (Basingstoke: Palgrave 2002) p. 94.

²⁴ *PRO FO 371/171140* December 20. 1962. *PRO PREM 11/5080* April 19.1963.

²⁵ *PRO FO 371/188931 NS 1053/8* Translators for Moscow Teleprinter link. M.J.E. Fretwell to personnel department. May 11. 1966.

unfamiliar with the jargon of strategic arms negotiations. ‘Therefore their translation of Carter’s message was marred by many inaccuracies and rough spots, which did not exactly facilitate its good reception by Soviet leaders.’²⁶ Nevertheless, oral communication is less reliable than the written record and leaves more room for speculation than written exchanges. Furthermore no time is lost on formalities or the danger of verbal decoys or stalling. In a crisis a number of people beside the head of government take part in forming policy and actions. The flow of information must be efficient and the quickest and most reliable way of distributing this kind of information is in written form.²⁷

The first hot line established in 1963 as well as all subsequent hot lines have taken the form of text-facility links, teletype, telex or facsimile. The only reference to a telephone hot line comes from an East German document in 1969. In it the East German chargé d’affaires refers to the Peking-Moscow hot line being a telephone link.²⁸ It is doubtful, considering that the Soviets were discussing or had established hot line links with France and Britain and had insisted on them being teletype, that they would establish a telephone link with China with whom they generally did not have good relations.²⁹

The negotiation of the initial hot line agreement revealed that the teletype link had its shortcomings as well. At the last moment the Soviets put in three final textual changes, which were accepted. The most significant of these was their ‘refusal to include provision for a second landline in emergency circumstances.’³⁰ Furthermore messages exchanged over the hot line would

²⁶<http://cwihip.si.edu/cwihiplib.nsf/16c6b2fc83775317852564a400054b28/ddfa37769fa82a4685256466006a5ed0A> “Missed Opportunity” – Carter, Brezhnev, SALT II, and the Vance Mission to Moscow, November 1976-March 1977, by G.M. Korniyenko, with introduction by Mark Garrison. 22 September 2002.

²⁷ PRO FCO 19/144 Secure Speech for Paris. J.A. Robinson to Sir C. O’Neill November 20. 1968. G. P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph. My Years as Secretary of State*. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons 1993). p. 732.

²⁸<http://cwihip.si.edu/cwihiplib.nsf/16c6b2fc83775317852564a400054b28/bbf1fd442ef0a72a852564ba006c4fbc>. Christian F. Osterman, *East German Documents on the Sino-Soviet Border Conflict, 1969*. 21 September 2002.

²⁹ The reference to a telephone hot line could be explained by a mistake in translation or more likely that the author of the original telegram assumed that the hot line was a telephone.

³⁰ PRO FO 371/171142 AI D1051/48 Telegram 243 Geneva UK Delegation to the 18-Nation Disarmament Conference Geneva to FO June 20. 1963. The American proposal had planned for another secondary teleprinter route through Washington, New York, Penmarch (Brittany), Frankfurt, Warsaw and Moscow. See PRO FO 371/171141 IA D1051/34 United States Proposals on Technical, Operational and Financial Matters in Connection With a Direct Communications Link Between the Governments of the USSR and the USA. May 6. 1963 p. 4. p. 1-30.

not be transmitted simultaneously in Russian and English only in the language from the sender.³¹ The last moment change of heart by the Soviets caused a lot of commotion in Moscow and Washington a few years later. An unsuspecting Finnish farmer ploughing his field, unfamiliar with the communications link that lay in his fertile soil cut the only telegraph line between the superpowers. A second telegraph line was installed shortly afterwards.³²

Although the Finnish incident did not put the hot line in danger, because radio back-up facilities existed, it was clear that improvements would make the communications link more secure. Originally the Washington-Moscow hot line was stationed in the National Military Command Centre at the Pentagon.³³ But when it was first put to use during the Six Day War it was soon realised that it was inconvenient to have the U.S. terminal in the Pentagon. Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defence, gave instructions that messages should be sent directly to the White House.³⁴

During the SALT-I treaty discussion in the early 1970s the Soviets showed interest in modernising the hot line. This was not least because of Soviet concern about their strained relations with China. The Soviet delegation was particularly interested in new measures to avoid nuclear war by accident, misunderstanding or miscalculation. Gerald C. Smith, the U.S. chief negotiator, says it was apparent that the Soviets were particularly worried about a nuclear conflict caused deliberately by a third party. In private and official discussions Soviet officials made veiled references to China as a possible source of such events.³⁵ It is therefore not surprising that the Soviet Delegation quickly agreed to the U.S. suggestion that communications facilities should be improved and upgraded.³⁶ Two satellite circuits were added to the hot line in order to increase its security and flexibility. Because neither leader was always in their capital the terminals needed to be more

³¹ PRO FO 371/171142 AI D1051/42 A.D.F. Pemberton-Piggott June 7. 1963.

³² A. Dobrynin, *In Confidence* p. 98. G.C. Smith, *Double Talk*. p. 281.

³³ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*. Volume V, p. 708.

³⁴ R. McNamara, *Blundering Into Disaster. Surviving the First Century of the Nuclear Age*. (New York: Pantheon Books 1986) p. 12.

³⁵ G. C. Smith, *Disarming Diplomat*. p. 174-175.

³⁶ G. C. Smith, *Double Talk*. pp. 140, 286-287.

mobile. Making the hot line a satellite link instead of a land-telegraph link served this purpose as well as making it less vulnerable in wartime.³⁷

Other minor but practical improvements have also been made on the Molink, as American technicians nicknamed the hot line.³⁸ Clocks were placed on each end showing the time of day in the other capital after the Six-Day War. Whether this was because Moscow had started transmission at 3:00 A.M. is pure speculation. In 1984 the hot line system was further improved by adding the capability to transmit facsimiles. Whole pages of text, maps and charts could be exchanged instantaneously. This was all done with the intention of increasing the reliability and speed of information flow.³⁹ The 21st century hot line now consists of two satellite circuits and a landline teletype link, which is used as backup. It is quicker and more reliable than before with the possibility of exchanging graphic material.⁴⁰ Speech facilities have not been included in the modification of the Washington-Moscow hot line.

Because the link has fortunately not been in constant use it has had to be tested each day. This called for creative dialogue between the archenemies. Poems and stories of all sorts were exchanged. However some of the exchanges caused puzzlement at least on the Soviet end. Andrei Gromyko once asked Dean Rusk: 'What does it mean when your people say, the quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog?'⁴¹ But the hot line raised more serious political questions.

Political Aspects of Hot Lines

The issue of who would be involved in the hot line agreement was the fundamental question that most troubled governments within the Western

³⁷ *SALT. The Moscow Agreements and Beyond.* Editors Mason Willrich and John B. Rhineland. (New York: The Free Press 1974.) p. 30, 126, 155. A. Dobrynin, *In Confidence* p. 98. G. C. Smith, *Double Talk.* p. 281, 292.

³⁸ L. B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point.* p. 287.

³⁹ B. M. Blechman, "Efforts to Reduce the Risk of Accidental or Inadvertent War" *U.S.—Soviet Security Cooperation. Achievements, Failures, Lessons.* Editors Alexander L. George, Philip J. Farley, Alexander Dallin. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1988) p. 471, 477. pp. 466-481. S. Talbott, *Deadly Gambits.* p. 323.

⁴⁰ <http://www.fas.org/nuke/control/hotline/intro.htm>. Hot line Agreements. 24 September 2002.

⁴¹ D. Rusk, *As I Saw It. A Secretary of State's Memoirs.* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd. 1991) p. 225.

Alliance. During the Cuban Crisis the European powers had watched from the sidelines. The Kennedy administration had kept its allies closely informed but their influence was marginal. Dean Acheson flew to Paris on October 22nd to keep French President Charles de Gaulle informed and to give him a copy of President Kennedy's letter to Khrushchev and a draft of his speech. Kennedy kept British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan personally informed through their mutual telephone link. Nevertheless both Macmillan and de Gaulle realized that they were being informed after the decisions had been made. De Gaulle stressed that it was important that governments keep in close contact during serious times through embassies.⁴² When the hot line issue was raised again after the October crisis warning bells went off in the British Government. The Prime Minister shared his thoughts with the Foreign Secretary:

People here generally realise that we have very good communications with the Americans, including my direct line but they are beginning to ask whether we shall be in on the direct line to Moscow or whether decisions will be made by Khrushchev and Kennedy and communicated to us afterwards; in fact the whole Cuba position institutionalised. At the moment we have no answer to these queries and have to pretend that we do not mind. In fact it is quite a serious point and if the Russians and the Americans do set up their system I feel myself that we ought to have a Moscow line as well as a Washington one.⁴³

Letting one country in on the hot line posed both political and technical problems. From a technical point of view it was difficult to add more users to the hot line without complicated modification. Furthermore even if such an expansion took place it would 'defeat the object of the Hot Line.' Too much information flow from different states in different languages could result in 'delay and confusion at a time when speed and decision were essential'⁴⁴ as the British embassy reported.

From a political point of view expanding or excluding states from the hot line posed a greater problem. The usual suspects lined up as possible contenders for joining the hot line club. But if France, West Germany, Canada or Britain

⁴² *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963*. Volume XI, Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath. Editors Charles S. Sampson, Louis J. Smith, General Editor David S. Patterson. (Washington: United States Government Printing Office 1996) p. 163-167, 210-212.

⁴³ PRO PREM 11/5080 M.164/63 Prime Minister's Personal Minute April 25. 1963.

⁴⁴ PRO FO 371/171145 Telegram 1190/63 from the British Embassy in Washington D.C. November 20, 1963.

had aspirations to take part they were soon quashed. It became clear early on that the proposed hot line was supposed to be an exclusive communications link between Washington and Moscow. The 1962 Working Paper had been fairly vague on who would be included but the supporting paper circulated at NATO removed all doubt that it was to be a bilateral link between the superpowers.⁴⁵

Even if an extension or expansion of the hot line was unlikely it was important to express the desire to be involved to ensure that no door was permanently closed and to avoid giving the impression of weakness to friends and foe alike.⁴⁶ For these reasons the British government acted quickly and informed the United States Disarmament Agency that Britain wanted to be included in such a link. This position was reaffirmed to the U.S. at NATO.⁴⁷ Although it was doubtful whether establishing a hot line connection would improve existing British diplomatic communication links the political arguments were strong for the U.K. to take part in such a project.

The reasons for British eagerness to be involved were clear. This was a question of power and prestige. The Foreign Secretary suggested a separate link between London and Moscow to supplement the existing link between London and Washington. But when it became known that the Washington-Moscow line was to be routed through London the first option became a tie-in to the line with a switchboard in London to create the possibility of three-cornered conversations. That would also have meant that all messages passed between the superpowers would be available to London. However, the switchboard would give Britain the opportunity to communicate with either of the superpowers without necessarily informing the other. The Foreign Office anticipated that the Americans and the Soviets could see this as an impediment to their bilateral agreement.⁴⁸

The British demonstrated a persistent fear of rejection from either or both the superpowers. An impromptu premature action could have damaged relations with the U.S and NATO solidarity. Furthermore, the British government was alert to the danger of being a possible scapegoat for the Soviets if the latter got cold feet.⁴⁹ Getting a hot line was important but not at any price. The Macmillan government had excellent relations with the

⁴⁵ PRO FO 371/171140 IA D1051/9 Emergency Communications. D.L. Benest January 28. 1963. PRO FO 371/171140 IA D1051/13 Emergency Communications February 14. 1963.

⁴⁶ PRO FO 371/171141 IA D1051/21 Joseph Godber April 10. 1963.

⁴⁷ PRO PREM 11/5080 Prime Minister PM/63/55 April 11. 1963.

⁴⁸ PRO FO 371/171141 Emergency Communications Between Heads of Government May 3. 1963.

⁴⁹ PRO FO 371/171140 Minutes January 8. 1963.

Kennedy administration, which had been careful to consult its allies about the Washington-Moscow hot line. For Britain to act without informing the U.S. could have put strains on relations between the two countries. A hot line was long-term policy and it was decided to wait and see how things developed before attempting to get involved either directly or indirectly. Even if the Americans were willing to let the U.K. in on the hot line the Russians also had to approve.⁵⁰

For the Americans this was also a delicate matter. They wanted to keep the agreement with the Soviet Union as it was and keep other states out. At the same time they had to consider how it would affect their allies. The Kennedy administration was lukewarm regarding British involvement. In light of the close relationship between the U.S. and Britain the latter were confident that they were frontrunners in the hot line race. This feeling was strengthened by the fact that the Italians, French and Canadians were not kept as closely informed.⁵¹ But these hopes were soon shattered. After the British approached the Americans early in May 1963 Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, proposed that any consideration of expanding the hot line should be postponed until after the U.S. and Soviet Union had reached an agreement. But when the negotiations were concluded a rather discouraging message came from Rusk.⁵²

I must confess that, upon considerable reflection, I do not believe that it would be wise for us to raise with the Soviets at this time the question of transforming the contemplated "Hot Line" between Washington and Moscow into a tripartite system. The principal subject with which you and we are dealing with Moscow It is not our expectation that the "Hot Line" would be used for normal conduct of business but it would be reserved for the emergency use which was its rationale under disarmament proposals.

It would seem to me better, therefore, to be certain that emergency communications between London and Washington are as effective as possible and to leave aside for the present the question of enlarging the

⁵⁰ PRO FO 371/171145 Emergency Communications April 25, 1963. PRO PREM 11/5080 Prime Minister PM/63/55 April 11, 1963.

⁵¹ PRO FO 371/171140 IA D1051/3 January 23, 1963. PRO FO 371/171141 IA D1051/22. [Notes and technical information from the U.S. Delegation]. PRO FO 371/171141 IA D1051/24 Telegram No. 188 From UK Delegation to the 18-Nation Disarmament Conference Geneva to FO May 11, 1963.

⁵² PRO FO 371/171143 The Hot Line August 1, 1963.

number of parties on the contemplated “Hot Line” pending further developments in East-West relations and inside of NATO itself.⁵³

The letter was nothing more than a polite brush-off but left open the possibility of a separate hot line between London and Moscow.⁵⁴ Rusk offered to assist the British in negotiations with the Soviets by discussing the technical and financial arrangements involved between the superpowers.⁵⁵ But by the end of the year British participation in the hot line had been shelved.⁵⁶ There were no pressing practical reasons to establish such a link and there was always the danger the Soviets could potentially use a hot line to try to divide Britain and the U.S. in a moment of crisis.⁵⁷

Although the U.S. and USSR had been unwilling to let states participate in the hot line there was a third party whom they could have kept involved without creating political problems with their allies, namely the United Nations. The Washington-Moscow hot line was not established to ease public concern but to lessen the risk of war by miscalculation or misunderstanding. Using the hot line as a public diplomacy tool or for propaganda reasons was not the underlying factor. However, the public and many states would have welcomed the involvement of the Secretary General of the United Nations in the hot line agreement. This had been suggested early on by both the Americans and the Soviets and was one option the British considered if they could not be involved directly themselves.⁵⁸ There was speculation about U.N. involvement in the hot line scheme in the media. At a Press Conference on April 11 1963 Secretary General U Thant said that he had not given much thought about the matter but would welcome it if Khrushchev or Kennedy

⁵³ PRO PREM 11/5080 Letter from Dean Rusk to David Ormsby Gore.

⁵⁴ PRO FO 371/171142 AI D1051/47 Telegram No 5686 FO to Washington Embassy June 17, 1963.

⁵⁵ PRO FO 371/171143 The Hot Line August 1, 1963. PRO PREM 11/5080 Prime Minister PM/63/55 April 11, 1963. PRO FO 371/171145 Telegram 1190/63 from the British Embassy in Washington D.C. November 20, 1963.

⁵⁶ PRO PREM 11/5080 The Foreign Office to the PM December 12, 1963. PRO FO 371/171145 December 3, 1963. PRO FO 371/171145 December 4, 1963.

⁵⁷ PRO PREM 11/5080 Briefing PM/63/103 FO to PM. Emergency Communications between Heads of Government: The Hot Line. August 2, 1963. PRO FO 371/171143 The Hot Line August 1, 1963.

⁵⁸ PRO PREM 11/5080 Briefing PM/63/103 FO to PM. Emergency Communications between Heads of Government: The Hot Line. August 2, 1963.

felt it necessary.⁵⁹ Neither the Americans nor the Soviets showed any real interest in pursuing the idea and it was soon dropped.⁶⁰

For practical reasons it was sensible to keep the direct link as simple as possible by excluding states or international agencies other than the superpowers. Inevitably hot line diplomacy placed a high premium on secrecy. Controlling the information flow to friends and foes alike was important. U.N. involvement could have increased the risk of leaks to parties that could try to influence or sabotage the superpowers' actions.

It was not only states that were anxious not to be cut out of the picture. The diplomatic establishment reacted cautiously to the idea of a direct government-to-government communications link. Although a majority of the Kennedy administration supported the idea a considerable part of it was opposed because of the 'possibility of blackmail.'⁶¹ These misgivings were not confined to American officials. How would hot lines affect diplomatic routes? On what grounds did they oppose the proposal and what alternatives were there?

Diplomatic Dimensions

The diplomatic establishment saw its vested interests threatened by the hot line. There was a possibility that such a direct line would not be confined to emergencies or crises but used in routine political discussions. The hot line proposals immediately caused alarm within the State Department that it 'might lead to their being short-circuited.' The U.S. ambassador in Moscow warned President Kennedy that 'Mr. Khrushchev could easily abuse a facility of this kind, and that it might lead to genuine misunderstandings.'⁶² Misgivings of a similar kind had been aired in 1960 when the State Department's Policy Planning Council proposed a hot line between the superpowers. Ambassador Merchant openly objected to the proposal and the idea was shelved for the time being.⁶³

⁵⁹ PRO FO 371/171140 IA D1051/20 Saving Telegram 118 U.K. Mission to the U.N to the Foreign Office April 11. 1963.

⁶⁰ PRO FO 371/171143 The Hot Line August 1. 1963.

⁶¹ PRO PREM 11/5080 April 19.1963.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ G. C. Smith, *Disarming Diplomat*. p. 107. Smith claims that because of the ambassador's objections the idea was dropped. Considering that presidential elections were near it is not inconceivable that the matter had simply been put on the shelf for the time being. The idea

The idea of a hot line also caused a reaction within the British Foreign Office, which did not question the need for a hot line between heads of government but was reluctant to 'encourage any tendency to by-pass the diplomatic services.'⁶⁴ The FO's Communications Department believed that messages passed through embassies were most likely to be effective. Furthermore the risk of misunderstanding was thought to be less likely.⁶⁵ Henry Kissinger claims that in times of crisis during his term in office getting messages through the Soviet embassy was a quicker route than the hot line.⁶⁶ But this all depended on how good communications were between governments and their embassies. When British officials got wind of the U.S. hot line proposals in 1962 they started to consider not only how to get involved but how effective and secure their own communications with Moscow were. How long would it take for a message to go from the PM to Mr. Khrushchev?⁶⁷

The outcome of this self-examination questioned the usefulness of British involvement in a direct government-to-government communication link. The diplomatic communications system was considered very reliable and quick. Good communications links existed with Washington, the White House and the embassy in Moscow. It was possible either for the PM or the U.S. President to make contact within two minutes through a commercial line teletype. Furthermore there was a direct telephone between the President and the PM, which could suffice as an indirect British involvement. This led the British embassy in Washington to conclude that in practice Britain was 'probably already joined to the Hot Line in the most effective way possible.'⁶⁸ Communication with Moscow was also considered sufficient. A short ciphered message of 500 words could be sent from London through the U.K. embassy in Moscow to the Kremlin in an hour over the Diplomatic Wireless Service (DWS). However Foreign Office officials thought that road traffic conditions in London could cause delays for a message going the other way.⁶⁹

was at least revived shortly after the elections by Smith's co-worker Henry Owen in cooperation with Walt Rostow.

⁶⁴ PRO FO 371/171140 Emergency Communications. December 18. 1962.

⁶⁵ PRO FO 371/171140 December 19. 1962.

⁶⁶ H. Kissinger, *The White House Years*. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson and Michael Joseph 1979) p. 909-913. Gerard C. Smith, *Disarming Diplomat*. p. 107.

⁶⁷ PRO FO 371/171140 Emergency Communications. December 18. 1962.

⁶⁸ PRO FO 371/171145 Telegram 1190/63 from the British Embassy in Washington D.C. November 20, 1963.

⁶⁹ PRO FO/371/188931 Direct Communications Link With the Soviet Government. Revised Final Draft.

It was established and acknowledged that existing diplomatic communication routes were able to function as emergency communication links. The superpowers could have decided to enhance embassy communication between their capitals. Ideas were discussed about having hot lines pass through embassies to monitor the exchanges of messages. But although the messages did not pass through embassies they had to be kept informed not least to elicit important information and advice from embassies.⁷⁰ Setting up a hot line would enable heads of state to engage in personal dialogue. A hot line, facsimile or not, does not improve the 'intimacy of ... exchanges' but it could 'reduce Ambassadorial contacts' for both sides.⁷¹ However one of the lessons of the Cuban Crisis was that embassies had not been able to get to higher placed officials.⁷² Creating alternative communication routes was simply sensible crisis management to preserve options.⁷³ Hot lines provide instant access and attention on the highest level, which might be closed to ambassadors in times of crisis. This was in Kissinger's evaluation their biggest asset. Hot lines confer a sense of urgency, as Kissinger points out, and get the attention of the most important people immediately.⁷⁴ For these reasons it had to be tempting to use it in other politically pressing matters even though its use ought to be confined to acute situations. But as Gerard Smith says both parties to a hot line agreement would have to agree for the facilities to be used in other circumstances than emergencies.⁷⁵

Symbolism and Significance of Hot Lines

Hot lines are direct communication of a certain kind. They were established to enable states with nuclear capabilities to engage in dialogue to avoid conflict breaking out. If they are used it is to indicate a special situation, a crisis. Just by activating the hot line a signal of urgency is being sent to the receiver. But the intended use of the hot line has sometimes become blurred.

⁷⁰ PRO FO 371/188931 NS1053/9 I.F.S. Vincent to Mr. Fretwell May 17. 1966.

⁷¹ PRO FO 371/188931 Direct Communications Link With the Soviet Government. Revised Final Draft.

⁷² PRO FO 371/188931 NS1053/9 I.F.S. Vincent to Mr. Fretwell May 17. 1966.

⁷³ C. Jönsson, *Superpower. Comparing American and Soviet Foreign Policy*. (London: Frances Pinter 1984) p. 193.

⁷⁴ H. Kissinger, *The White House Years*. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson and Michael Joseph 1979) p. 909-913. Gerard C. Smith, *Disarming Diplomat*. p. 107.

⁷⁵ *SALT. The Moscow Agreements and Beyond*. p. 155.

The original hot lines were never intended to be used for anything other than the most urgent matters of war and peace. This was defined in the U.S. 1962 Working Paper as circumstances where,

sudden change in the military situation or the emergence of a military crisis which might appear directly to threaten the security of either of the states involved and where such developments were taking place at a rate which appeared to preclude the use of normal consultative procedures.

But it also stressed that the effectiveness of the link 'should not be degraded through use of other matters.'⁷⁶ The hot line is by design a secret communication link. It is therefore difficult to make claims about how it has actually been used. However on at least three occasions the Washington-Moscow hot line has been used for matters not of direct consequence for war or peace. When the SALT-II negotiations were stalled Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's National Security Advisor, convinced the president to send a message to Brezhnev through the hot line in a way it had never been used before. On another occasion Carter used the hot line to try to get Brezhnev to help achieve a cease-fire in Lebanon through Soviet influence in Syria.⁷⁷ This practice continued at least once during the Reagan presidency. Ministers argued fiercely whether it was the appropriate to send a message through the hot line in the Daniloff espionage case.⁷⁸

The elusive definition of a hot line has created a general misunderstanding about the usage of hot lines. When the British Prime Minister Harold Wilson brought the matter of establishing a hot line up with Kosygin he argued that there 'might be occasions when the Americans might find it preferable to make urgent points to the Russians through a third party rather than directly, and vice versa.'⁷⁹ But this would merely have made Britain a mediator and the hot line would have ceased to be an emergency communication link. It is likely that the Prime Minister was thinking of the

⁷⁶ *UN Docs*, Disarmament Commission (DCOR) ENDC 70 12. December 1962. p. 11.

⁷⁷ J. Carter, *Keeping Faith. Memoirs of a President*. (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press 1995) p. 238-239. Z. Brezezinski, *Power and Principle. Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981*. (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux 1985) p. 161.

⁷⁸ G. P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph. My Years as Secretary of State*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1993). p. 732.

⁷⁹ PRO FO 371/188931 NS1053/1 Conversation between the Prime Minister and Mr. Kosygin at dinner at the British Embassy, 23. February, 1966. Hot Line. [Notes by Roderick Braithwaite the interpreter during the visit.]. PRO CAB 164/2 Visit of the Prime Minister H. Wilson to Moscow 1966, February and July.

hot line as an additional contact link for normal political dialogue but not a hot line as such.⁸⁰ The communication link established in 1997 between Greece and Turkey was perhaps similar to Wilson's ideas. A direct line was created between NATO headquarters in Brussels and Athens and Ankara. In military emergencies messages pass from either capital to Brussels. In the event of a crisis NATO can then intervene immediately.⁸¹ Although this communication link was termed a hot line it is questionable whether it fits the definition. This could at best be defined as an indirect hot line with Brussels as a switchboard, similar to the British suggestion in 1963 when the Washington-Moscow hot line was established.

The lack of clarity in distinguishing between a hot line and other means of direct communications was even never more apparent than during the attempt to establish a hot line between Canberra and London in 1969-1971. During a Commonwealth Prime Minister's Conference in London in January 1969 Gorton, the Australian PM, raised the issue of establishing a hot line between No. 10 and his office in Canberra 'to enable them to exchange messages directly when necessary, as a supplement to the normal method of working through High Commissions.'⁸² This was technically easy and using a ciphering equipment with telex not too expensive. It was the opinion of British officials that Gorton had in mind a direct secure speech telephone, which they were not keen on establishing both because of cost but also for technical reasons. They preferred setting up a telex system.⁸³ The matter dragged on for two years and new Prime Ministers entered the scene, McMahon in Australia and Heath in Britain. Informally Australian officials joked with their British colleagues that anyone who had a 'hot line to Mr. McMahon, – who is a compulsive telephoner at all hours of the day and night – must expect the line to be really hot.'⁸⁴ This was a certain misconception of the hot line. To create a direct secure telephone was one thing but a hot line all together different. If the Canberra-London communication link was to be used frequently then it was not a hot line at all but a personal contact line for heads of government. Furthermore using hot lines for run of the mill diplomatic relations not only undermines the seriousness of this means of

⁸⁰ PRO FO 371/188931 NS1053/9 D.L. Benest to M.J. Fretwell May 12. 1966.

⁸¹ *The European* March 6 1997 p. 2. "Nato pleads for calm in the Aegean".

⁸² PRO PREM 13/2921 J.O.H. Burrough (Cabinet Office) to A.N. Halls (10. Downing Street) January 21. 1969.

⁸³ PRO, PREM 15/646 FCO to 10. Downing Street February 3. 1971.

⁸⁴ PRO, PREM 15/646 P.A.G. Westlake (British High Commission Canberra) to D.P. Aiers (FO) April 5. 1971.

communications but it is also less efficient. Why then establish a hot line at all? These Commonwealth countries were very unlikely to be at each other's throats. Both governments had sufficient communication links between them already. On the other hand it was a matter of prestige to have such a link between the states and giving it such an important name increased its political weight.

The political weight assigned to some acts is more significant than their intrinsic importance. In 1992 a friendship treaty was signed in London between Britain and Russia, the first since the 1766 Treaty of Amity and Commerce. One of the measures announced was the creation of a hot line. It is not unlikely that the announcement served a public diplomacy agenda, to signify a change in relations between the two states. Another possibility is that it wasn't a hot line per se but merely a direct communication link to discuss routine matters of state not confined to emergencies.⁸⁵

Whether the communication link in question is a hot line or not is sometimes irrelevant. The political significance connected to it is such that other considerations fall into the shadows. When the London-Moscow hot line had been in the making an official stated that the PM was not interested in practical arguments but merely in the existence of such a link 'rather than in the use which might be made of it.'⁸⁶

Hot lines were not merely a tool of the Cold War. It could even be argued that the importance of hot line agreements between the superpowers for disarmament was rather slight. But hot lines have more dimensions than merely a functional one. From a psychological point of view its public appeal was and remains very important. The impact of the Cuban Missile Crisis brought home the truth that full-scale nuclear war was possible. The Soviet-American hot line was an ointment to public anxiety. Creating a link between the leaders that controlled the majority of the Earth's nuclear arms was reassuring. It showed that an agreement was possible and differences could be accommodated.⁸⁷ The public diplomacy side of the hot line was put into use early on by President Kennedy. In a speech at the American University in Washington, on June 10 1963, he stressed that the Soviet Union and the U.S. were taking steps by creating a direct line between Moscow and Washington

⁸⁵ *Press Association* January 30 1992 "Yeltsin and Major lift threat of nuclear holocaust". *The Herald* (Glasgow) November 10, 1992 p, 2 "Major and Yeltsin encounter only amity with new treaty".

⁸⁶ PRO FO 371/188931 NS1053/9 E.J.W. Barnes May 25. 1966.

⁸⁷ PRO FO 371/188931 NS1053/9 D.L. Benest to M.J. Fretwell May 12. 1966. Glenn T. Seaborg, *Kennedy, Khrushchev and the Test Ban*. p. 207.

to enhance understanding between the states by increasing contact and communication.⁸⁸ The Soviets were not as keen to use the hot line as a public propaganda tool and were eager to play down the significance of the hot line.⁸⁹ The head of the Soviet Delegation in Geneva, Tsarapkin, was 'at pains to play down the importance of the "Hot Line" agreement' and expressed their dislike of what they considered to be 'the exaggerated nature of Western press reaction to the agreement.'⁹⁰ Perhaps it was a sour reminder of how much of a blunder the Cuban affair had been for the Soviet Union.

Not many years later when the superpowers reached an agreement on modernising the hot lines the Soviets played a different tune. Whereas the original agreement had been signed by low-level officials in low-key fashion, pomp and circumstance were the order of the day on 30 September 1971. At a signing ceremony both Secretary of State William Rogers and Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko provided ample photo opportunities.⁹¹ The form of the new hot line agreement had proved the most difficult stage of the negotiations. The U.S. simply wanted an amendment to the 1963 *Memorandum of Understanding* while the Soviets pressed for a new agreement. 'Informally, the Soviets indicated that their leaders attached political importance to a new agreement.' They wanted to make a fanfare out of this achievement and the U.S. finally acquiesced.⁹²

The strengthening or building of confidence between governments has been one of the most valuable aspects of hot lines. They have increasingly been used as an important first step in building or enhancing confidence between both friendly and unfriendly states, symbolizing improved relations or intention to do so. During President de Gaulle's visit to the Soviet Union at the end of June 1966 an agreement was announced that established a direct teleprinter line between the Kremlin and the Elysée Palace. The Paris-Moscow hot line had not required lengthy technical discussions and clearly was a political decision.⁹³ The Soviets were more reluctant to grant the British the same. Perhaps it was precisely because of the symbolism associated with it

⁸⁸ *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States. John F. Kennedy. Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the President.* January 1. to November 22. 1963. (Washington: United States Government Printing Office 1964) p. 232.

⁸⁹ PRO PREM 11/5080 April 19.1963.

⁹⁰ PRO FO 371/171141 IA D1051/22 UK Delegation to the 18-Nation Disarmament Conference Geneva to the FO April 17. 1963.

⁹¹ *SALT. The Moscow Agreements and Beyond.* pp. 30, 126, 155.

⁹² G. C. Smith, *Double Talk.* p. 296.

⁹³ PRO FO 371/188931 A Direct Link With the Kremlin. August 31. 1966.

or that they intended to use the French to drive a wedge in NATO solidarity. For Britain it was important for its prestige to get a hot line link with the Soviets. It signalled that they still were a great power.

Hot lines have continued to serve as symbols of improved bilateral relations. This was particularly evident in the late 1980s and early 1990s. While the Soviet Union was going through a transition period under Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin a sudden thaw emerged in the Cold War structure. One of the symbols of better relations with the Soviet Union and subsequently Russia was the establishment or upgrading of hot lines with its former enemies.

A hot line was established between Bonn and the Kremlin in 1989 consisting of a telefax connection. German officials were ecstatic about the new connection and claimed it was better than what they had with the White House.⁹⁴ A month later it was announced in Paris that the Paris-Kremlin hot line was to be improved from being a telex, which it had been during De Gaulle's time, to be replaced by a high-speed fax machine.⁹⁵ Three years later good and direct communication between the heads of the British and the Russian government were used to illustrate a new dawn in relations between the states. It comes as no surprise that the device to be established was called a hot line⁹⁶ and was to be used to 'facilitate the new relationship'.⁹⁷ Whether it actually was a hot line was beside the point. The symbolic weight or in other words the public diplomacy value of linking a hot line to improved relations between these particular states outweighed other factors.

With the end of the Cold War the importance of good relations with China was underscored. Both Russia and the United States tried hard to improve relations with the giant of the East. The Soviets had a hot line to the PRC leadership which they used during the frontier confrontation with China in March 1969. However, the Chinese communists refused to respond to Kosygin's attempts to contact Mao Zedong or any other leader of the Chinese Politburo. The attempts of the Soviet embassy to make clear Moscow's desire for peace to the Chinese Foreign Ministry were also ignored. The Chinese informed Moscow that the direct communication link 'was no longer

⁹⁴ *The Guardian* June 10. 1989 "Germany set to welcome Gorbachev". *The Guardian*, October 3 1989 "East Germany accuses Bonn of breaching trust".

⁹⁵ *The Guardian* July 4. 1989, "French greet perestroika message with scepticism".

⁹⁶ *Press Association* January 30. 1992 "Yeltsin and Major lift threat of nuclear holocaust". *The Herald* (Glasgow) November 10. 1992 p, 2 "Major and Yeltsin encounter only amity with new treaty".

⁹⁷ *The Independent*, January 31. 1992 p. 1. "The main point agreed yesterday"

“advantageous” and normal diplomatic channels would suffice.⁹⁸ This humiliation and disconnection of the hot line was perhaps a consequence of internal political struggle but also sent a message to the Soviets about how seriously the relations between the states had deteriorated.

Kissinger and Nixon’s desire to improve relations with China also resulted in a hot line proposal. In a secret meeting with Zhou Enlai in Beijing in November 1973 Kissinger made the offer. He suggested this could be done either by simply announcing the establishment of a hot line or by hiding it in an agreement on accidental nuclear war like the Soviet-American one. The American proposal was interesting considering that the states had not established full diplomatic relations. Embassies had not been opened but relations were conducted through liaison offices. There was therefore a political problem. A hot line was a very visible signal of Sino-American rapprochement but at that moment it was probably too large a step to take for the Chinese who never responded to the proposal.⁹⁹

In the 1990s the worldview had changed in Peking. Chinese leaders attempted to improve their relations and image after the 1989 massacre in Tiananmen Square. The U.S. had promised China to assist the PRC with this process in exchange for their abstention on UN resolutions against Iraq. Early in the 1990s there were discussions between the U.S. and China about establishing a hot line between the states. But these discussions were postponed in 1996 when rapid reconciliation occurred between the old enemies Russia and China. One of the public initiatives used to highlight this new phase in Sino-Russian relations was the intended hot line that would be revived between Moscow and Peking.¹⁰⁰ During Jiang’s visit to the U.S. in 1997 it was announced that a hot line was also to be established with Washington. This was a confidence building measure.¹⁰¹ In April 1998 Madeline Albright, U.S. Secretary of State and Tang Jiaxuang Foreign

⁹⁸<http://cwihip.si.edu/cwihplib.nsf/16c6b2fc83775317852564a400054b28/bbf1fd442ef0a72a852564ba006c4fbc>. Christian F. Osterman, *East German Documents on the Sino-Soviet Border Conflict, 1969*. 21.09.2002.

⁹⁹ *The Kissinger Transcripts. The Top Secret Talks With Beijing and Moscow*. Editor William Burr. (New York: The New Press 1998) p. 204.
http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/publications/DOC_readers/kissinger/notes.htm
The Kissinger Transcripts: Notes and Excerpts. 21.09.2002.

¹⁰⁰ *The Independent* April 26. 1996 p, 10 “Kremlin and China hail ties of friendship toast new friendship”.

¹⁰¹ *The Observer* 2. November 1997, p. 15. “China revels in US show of respect”. *The Sunday Times* November 2, 1997, “Congress turns heat on Jiang with anti-China bills”.

Minister of China signed an agreement establishing a hot line between the two states.¹⁰² This served both the means of propaganda and reassuring the public that both nuclear powers were taking actions to minimize the possibility of nuclear war. This was particularly significant from a Chinese point of view because it could be seen as confirmation of China's superpower status.

Even an established hot line agreement has been used to mend bilateral relations. The relations between the superpowers had deteriorated during President Carter's last years in office, mostly because of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and difficult SALT negotiations. President Reagan's rhetoric and depiction of the Soviet Union as the evil empire did not improve relations between the superpowers during his first years in office. In 1983 the Reagan team was looking for topics to set up a summit between Reagan and Andropov. The timing was not accidental. One of the issues raised as a possible topic to initiate talks was upgrading the hot line. Although there existed a war of words between the two camps at the time and the Soviets were unwilling to enter into discussions about arms control they were willing to discuss upgrading the hot line, which shows how marginal and uncontroversial the topic had become. On the American side the suggestion of discussing upgrading the hot line was not thought to be exciting enough to get a summit meeting. It was regarded as 'something of a joke— "arms-control junk food" was a common phrase around the State Department.'¹⁰³ Nevertheless it led to discussions which resulted in modification of the hot line.

Although the functional aspects of hot lines are the reason for their creation their symbolic value should not be overlooked. Hot lines have proven to be a valuable tool in bilateral relations to signify improved or deteriorating relations of states, as was the case when China terminated the Moscow-Peking hot line.

¹⁰² <http://www.fas.org/news/china/1998/980429-prc.htm>. Script from Voice of America. 24.09.2002.

¹⁰³ S. Talbott, *Deadly Gambits. The Reagan Administration and the Stalemate in Nuclear Arms Control*. (London: Pan Books 1985) p. 322-323.

Hot Lines in Use

'Mr. President ... the hot line is up.' The voice on the telephone was Robert McNamara informing President Lyndon B. Johnson at 7:57 A.M. in the morning of 5 June 1967 that Moscow was calling on the hot line. A few hours earlier the President had been informed that war had broken out in the Middle East.¹⁰⁴ After the hot line became operational on August 30th 1963 exchanges of messages had been confined to daily checks by sending passages from Soviet literature from the Kremlin to which the Pentagon replied with extract from the Encyclopaedia Britannica.¹⁰⁵ Each time the hot line was activated during the 1967 conflict the core of the Johnson Administration including the U.S. Ambassador to Moscow, Llewellyn Thompson, gathered round the teleprinter waiting anxiously for the translation. At the same time their counterparts in the Kremlin waited in suspense to receive an answer. Messages had to be carefully reconstructed, each word laid out to make sure the sentences they formed would not be misunderstood or misconstrued even though they were written in the White House's Situation Room over scrambled eggs.

The hot line lived up to expectations and proved to be an effective tool to clear up misunderstandings, clarify intentions and avoid miscalculation which otherwise could have led to escalation of a conflict. Through the hot line the Americans were able to clear false allegation from the Arabs that U.S. carrier-based planes had taken part in attacks on Egypt. On 8 June a possible misunderstanding was avoided when Israeli gunboats attacked a U.S. Navy communications ship, the *Liberty*, killing 10 men and wounding hundreds. The hot line was used to explain that the U.S. was sending an aircraft carrier to investigate and assist the *Liberty*. The U.S. asked the Soviets to convey this message to the Egyptians, which they did.¹⁰⁶ A bigger test was still to come.

By 8 June the crisis seem to be resolved. A cease-fire agreement had been reached between Israel, Jordan and Egypt but fighting continued between Israel and Syria on the Golan Heights. A rough translation of a hot line message from the Kremlin received on the morning of 10 June indicated that the Soviets were contemplating sending troops to the Middle East. Robert

¹⁰⁴ L.B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point*. p. 287, 297-298.

¹⁰⁵ PRO FO 371/171145 Telegram 1190/63 from the British Embassy in Washington D.C. November 20. 1963.

¹⁰⁶ L.B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point*. p. 298-299.

McNamara says that in effect it said: 'If you want war, you will get war.'¹⁰⁷ The message contained serious words: 'Very crucial moment,' 'Catastrophe,' 'independent decision,' 'military actions.' The atmosphere in the Situation Room in the White House was tense because the next message could decide which direction the conflict would take. Ambassador Thompson checked the accuracy of translation of the Russian message. Johnson decided to send the Sixth fleet 50 miles off the Syrian coast. This signal was clear. The President was willing to call Kosygin's bluff. Nonetheless Johnson realized that he had to send a 'temperate and factual...' hot line message to Kosygin. As the hours passed by the messages from the Kremlin became more temperate and tension at both ends eased. Johnson did not have any reservations attributing the success of preventing full-scale war involving the superpowers to rapid communications:

The overriding importance of the hot line was that it engaged immediately the heads of government and their top advisers, forcing prompt attention and decisions. There was unusual value in this, but also danger. We had to weigh carefully every word and phrase. I took special pains not only to handle this crisis deliberately but to set a quiet, unhurried tone for all our discussions.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

A hot line is a delicate tool in diplomatic relations. Its existence or use does not ensure peace and goodwill among states. It is intended for use in the most critical moments in international relations. At these times it can ensure better accuracy in understanding a message and sending one. The written form also makes it possible, if desired, to distribute exchanges of hot line messages to the diplomatic establishment in a more accurate and secure way than if the hot line was a voice link. The hot lines established since the Washington-Moscow example have generally followed this precedent. The hot line can have an advantage over normal diplomatic routes, for example the embassy, because a hot line message indicates importance and urgency and compels attention from the highest placed officials, which could be difficult to get to during crisis.

¹⁰⁷ R. McNamara, *Blundering Into Disaster. Surviving the First Century of the Nuclear Age*. (New York: Pantheon Books 1986) p. 13. *The Guardian* March 21 1988 "Russian Diary: East and West plug a hot-line into history".

¹⁰⁸ L.B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point*. p. 301-303.

Hot lines have four main functions. They can be essential in tilting the balance in preserving peace between states. This is the hot line as a crisis management apparatus. The Washington-Moscow hot line proved itself the first time it was needed during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. In this instance it was useful in preventing escalating tensions between the superpowers. The Washington-Moscow link fulfilled its expectation in that crisis by reducing the risk of war by misunderstanding or misapprehension. Secondly hot lines have a psychological side. They can allay public concern about the risk of accidental war. Linked to this is the third aspect. Hot lines have been used as symbols in bilateral relations. In this sense its most prevalent use is to signal improved relations between states. The role of the hot line is often to build confidence. Establishing such a link can also be to underline strong and long lasting ties between states. A fourth role of hot lines is to signify the importance of states themselves. This is the prestige factor and the political reason why states seek to be involved in hot line agreements. It underlines the importance of the state possessing such a link. Hot lines have notably been established between the most powerful states but not among smaller states.

The Washington-Moscow hot line was a security device in relations between the most powerful nuclear powers. It was primarily established to ensure that the superpowers would not inadvertently stumble into war with each other. Other functions of hot lines were positive side effects. However in later years they seem to be pursued because of their prestige and symbolism rather than because of their practical value in emergencies. It seems that it has become more common in recent years to establish hot line connections between states. However it is questionable whether they are all hot lines by definition or merely direct communication links to discuss routine political issues. This underlines how important hot lines are viewed in bilateral relations and for political prestige of states. There are other means of communicating on political and less acute issues. For sensitive discussions the embassy route still provides a secure and reliable means of communications. But possessing a hot line link, even though merely in name, confers a sense of importance. Possessing embassies is not as unique as it once was. The overwhelming majority of states use them in their relations with the outside world. Perhaps hot lines will lose their sense of prestige once they become ordinary tools of the diplomatic trade or are said to be so.