What Is a Cable?

Diplomatic cables are the official communications between embassies and consulates abroad and the Department of State. They memorialize the conduct of foreign policy; they contain démarche instructions to posts, negotiation guidelines, memos of conversations, and policy recommendations; and they report on local events, providing a constant stream of information about what’s happening around the world. Cables often include a “comment” with analysis and policy recommendations from embassy officers.

How to Read a Cable

**DIPLOMATIC DOCUMENTS:**
- aide-mémoire: An informal note of a conversation that serves merely to help with memory recall.
- démarche: A formal diplomatic take on a government’s official position on a given subject written to another government or international organization.
- memorandum: A written statement on any subject, generally routine, from one organization to another.
- non-paper: A paper—despite the name—that summarizes a démarche or other verbal presentation to a foreign government. See aide-mémoire.
- opinion piece: An article that articulates specific US government policies and views written for foreign media outlets.

**FACT:**

The greatest cable ever written was George Kennan’s Long Telegram, sent from the Moscow embassy in 1946.

**O 031604Z MAY 00**

Known as the cable’s date-time group (DTG), this is the standard date and time format recording when the document was created. The DTG uses Zulu time (GMT)—as indicated by the Z—followed by the month and two-digit year.

**NODIS**

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