

20 August 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: Assistant Comptroller, Requirements
and Evaluation

SUBJECT : The CIA/NSA Relationship

REFERENCES : 1.) Memo from DDCI to [redacted] dated
9. July 1976 76-8347-2 [redacted] 25X1A
2.) Memo from [redacted] Chairman,
SIGINT Task Force to Dr. Sayre Stevens,
dated 12 August 1976, Subject: CIA
Analysts and NSA [redacted] 25X

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1. Over the past 25 years numerous studies and study groups have attempted to define and analyze the problems endemic to the CIA/NSA relationship. These problems are generally twofold. One is the CIA role with regard to SIGINT collection vis-a-vis NSA. The other revolves around how and in what form NSA chooses to publish SIGINT information.

2. In its early years NSA looked respectfully and appreciatively to CIA for guidance as to what it should collect and produce. It also depended frequently on the Agency for support in its annual quests for funds in the DoD budget arena. As time passed and its budget doubled, tripled and quadrupled, NSA began to swell its corporate chest and develop a personality and style of its own. An organization which began with a serious inferiority complex gradually developed a feeling that it has "a corner on the market" in terms of intelligence information fit to print.

3. This new feeling of importance by NSA manifested itself in various ways such as the installation of a direct communications link over CIA objections between Ft. Meade and the White House and the issuance of the SIGINT Summary, a SIGINT current intelligence publication designed to compete with the then Central Intelligence Bulletin. (CIA also objected, to no avail, to the SIGINT Summary because it contained then as now gists and summaries of what NSA analysts consider to be "hot" items of information which were in the process of being published in individual translation or report form, but for which NSA wanted to get credit in the eyes of top level intelligence recipients.

4. NSA's new feeling of importance became evident in many other ways, such as footnotes to various political and military NIE's, in public and not so public forums in which NSA reps let it be known in numerous ways that there was little or no need for "middlemen" such as CIA, DIA, etc., to chew, digest and regurgitate perfectly good SIGINT data and provide it to the real intelligence consumers such as the President, the Secretary of State and the NSC Staff.

5. As a part of its ceaseless effort to assert itself more vigorously in the intelligence process, NSA began a policy of "gradualism" with regard to the format and content of its output. More and more it put less and less data in its publications, always with the explanation or excuse that it wanted to improve its or the Community's security and provide "better service" to its customers. Almost all of these changes made the SIGINT product less meaningful and more difficult for our analysts to interpret. Most such changes were instituted unilaterally by NSA and announced after the fact, if at all. In almost all instances, however, consumers objected, but almost always to no avail. NSA began more and more to hide behind the "technical information" dodge which meant that users of SIGINT data had no need for and weren't really to be trusted with information on intercept positions, collection capabilities, traffic volume, crypt systems, etc. Such practices have usually been at the heart of most CIA analyst complaints.

6. During this period (which extends to the present) CIA representatives at various levels from all Agency directorates objected to the NSA way of doing business. More and more as NSA became stronger and more aggressive it became an uphill battle for Agency reps in defense of the DCI's and Agency's position and responsibilities in the intelligence business. The increasingly aggressive, determined and sometimes overbearing policy on NSA's part and the lack of a steady, coherent, reasoned and positive Agency policy supported by top Agency management have resulted almost by default in the emergence of NSA in a Community role in which the tail too often wags the dog.

7. Another part of NSA's plan to reign supreme is its sometimes subtle and sometimes not so subtle but never ceasing efforts to gain control over CIA SIGINT activities. This effort has many aspects not the least important of which has been its "backdoor lobbying" with all investigative and budget groups, including Congressional, OMB and DoD. NSA's principal argument is that DIRNSA/CSS is the "National SIGINT Authority" who by definition should have total control

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of all U.S. SIGINT activities, including CIA and the Service Cryptologic Agencies (Army, Navy and Air Force). The NSA hardliners define "National SIGINT Authority" as meaning NSA control of all U.S. SIGINT manning, tasking, budgeting, programming and output.

8. NSA's almost phenomenal success in achieving independence to an unprecedented extent and its ability to frustrate any Community effort, with which it disagrees, to control and influence it is attributable to at least three factors. One is the long experience of NSA management in political infighting and its ability to defend itself through obfuscation, specious arguments and, on some occasions, its steadfast refusal to cooperate with community groups and individuals whose purpose NSA consider inimical to its own interests. Actions which NSA sometimes considers inimical include efforts to provide guidance in the collection and production of SIGINT, including Agency or Community efforts to gauge and evaluate the NSA output.

9. A second reason for the present state of affairs is the lack of a coordinated Agency (not DDI, DDS&T or DDO) effort to establish and maintain a healthy and viable relationship with NSA. Too much Agency business is transacted with NSA by individuals and components without due regard to the interests of other Agency components. No consistent central record is maintained of the multitude of problems which Agency individuals at all levels have with NSA. This means that every time a review of CIA/NSA relations is conducted a poll is taken, either in writing or by personal interview, usually with the underlying belief by most participants that nothing will be done to correct the problems anyway. The principal deficiency, however, has been the general failure at the Agency management level to get involved with such mundane and sometimes too technical problems. The result has been that no one in recent years at a sufficiently high level has gone to the mat with NSA on any issue. For this reason, many people at NSA have the impression that CIA is manned by a collection of nice, gentle and toothless pussycats.

10. A third factor involves CIA's failure over all these years to define clearly legal and defensible Agency functions and responsibilities in the U.S. SIGINT business. NSA keeps picking, nibbling and lobbying away at CIA SIGINT activities to the point that members of the Congress, their staffs and OMB are now causing many people in the Agency to doubt more than ever before that the Agency has a legitimate SIGINT role to play.

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11. There appears never to have been a full appreciation for or understanding within the Agency of the scope and importance of the Agency accomplishments within the SIGINT field. Recognition should be given to the fact that without CIA's support NSA's [redacted] dollar plus effort in many areas would come to a standstill. When one considers that CIA-managed SIGINT activities contribute (directly and indirectly) to about 40 percent of NSA's serialized reporting output with an Agency SIGINT budget about one-thirtieth the size of NSA's, it becomes clear that the Agency has something to be proud of. It should also become clear that such impressive and valuable assets should not be removed from the Agency without a great deal of thought and full consideration of all the facts.

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12. The guidelines laid down in the 9 July 1976 memorandum to [redacted] are an important first step toward getting the Agency's thinking straight and our own house in order. A positive and compelling argument in response to the first question asked by the DDCI (What must CIA do in SIGINT in keeping with the CIA mission?) is crucial to the Agency's position. The second question by the DDCI is also on the mark, but should also address: What has CIA done to help the Community at large? Whatever the Agency position, an objective and complete revelation of past Agency accomplishments is essential and will go a long way toward answering "What can the Agency do to help the Community at large in this same area?"

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13. In the event that the new SIGINT Task Force concludes that the Agency does have an important and meaningful role to play in SIGINT, it will require vigorous, imaginative and united action on the part of all Agency components, especially at the top, to convince Congressional and other critics of the rightness of our cause.

[redacted]

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Requirements & Evaluation Staff
Office of the Comptroller

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Remarks:

Hank:

This unsolicited piece from [redacted] of CGAS is perceptive and thoughtful in its review of CIA-NSA relations over the years. [redacted] also served a rotational tour in [redacted]

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