Cryptologic Spectrum
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National Intelligence Warning:

The Alert Memorandum (U)

~~(C)~~ Warning is a primary objective of intelligence activities and organizations. For the U.S. Sigint System (USSS), an abiding concern is the timely reporting of Sigint information which contributes to the development of warning intelligence of varying dimensions and scope, including national, strategic, and tactical. This article presents a brief description of the development, philosophy, and production process associated with the Alert Memorandum (AM) — an Intelligence Community report used to highlight critical warning intelligence for national policymakers.

Historical Background (U)

~~(S)~~ In the wake of the Yom Kippur War (1973), it was concluded that the Intelligence Community had failed to issue an unambiguous warning of imminent Arab-Israeli hostilities. To be sure, it was felt that the "indications" had been available and reported appropriately. However, the interpretation and analysis of these facts had not resulted in the issuance of a clear Community warning to national decision makers. Months later, the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs expressed serious concern about the failure of the Intelligence Community to provide adequate warning of impending crises.

~~(S)~~ It was in this context of increasing concern regarding the overall performance of the Community in the intelligence warning area that the idea of an "Alerting Memorandum" arose. In a memorandum for United States Intelligence Board (USIB) principals, dated 28 August 1974, the DCI proposed this new "art form," designed to serve as a reporting vehicle by which the DCI,[1] speaking for the Community, could warn national policymakers as to the potential and implications of a critically developing situation at the earliest possible juncture. Underscoring the simplicity of the proposal, the DCI noted that "it would require no new mechanism, personnel, or funds" and that the publication process would occur entirely within the existing Community structure and procedures.[2] Accordingly, he proposed that USIB consider the matter at an early meeting.

~~(S)~~ USIB discussed and endorsed the concept on 12 September 1974. In addition, it was agreed that the Community staff, in conjunction with an ad hoc committee, would proceed at once to develop and coordinate specific guidelines and procedures. Meanwhile, as the ad hoc committee reworked drafts of the formal procedures — a process extending through the fall of 1974 — the DCI initiated use of the AM almost immediately following its endorsement by USIB.[3] Formal USIB approval of the results of the committee's effort came with the initial presentation of the subject procedures on 9 January 1975.[4]

~~(S)~~ Thus far the AM has had two lives. For two years — from September 1974 to August 197

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[1] (U) See USIB-D-28.5/5, 28 August 1974, subject: "An Intelligence Alert System."

[2] (U) *Ibid.*

[3] ~~(S)~~ Prior to the promulgation of official procedures, three AMs were issued: [redacted]

[4] (U) See USIB-D-28.5/8, 9 January 1975, subject: "Procedures for Alert Memoranda."

— the AM was used regularly by successive DCIs. During this period some 24 AMs were issued, averaging two per month. However, there were eight months during which no AM was issued. After the change in administrations resulting from the election of 1976, use of the AM was suspended for more than two years.[5]

(S) During August 1978, the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI) issued the results of a study of the performance and capability of the Community in fulfilling the warning mission. The staff report recommended, *inter alia*, that the DCI "provide a focus for warning leadership in the Community." In elaborating on this, the report proposed that the DCI appoint a special assistant for warning who would, *inter alia*, assume responsibility for the "adoption, evaluation, or discarding mechanisms (such as Intelligence Alert Memoranda)."[6]

(S) Within a relatively short period following the issuance of the HPSCI Report, several significant developments occurred. The DCI established a senior staff officer for all warning matters, designated the "National Intelligence Officer for Warning" (hereafter referred to as the NIO/W,[7] to replace the dormant Special Assistant for Warning position. The DCI asserted that the Deputy DCI, exercising a traditional role as the "DCI's overseer for Warning," would chair a committee on warning at the National Foreign Intelligence Board (NFIB) level. A Warning Working Group (WWG) was formed, under the chair of the NIO/W, to discuss and coordinate Community warning matters. As an initial task the WWG undertook an extensive revision of outdated policy and procedural guidance.

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(S) Meanwhile, pending the promulgation of revised guidance, the NIO/W began to exercise his responsibilities and authority. The AM was revived as the Intelligence Community warning vehicle, and on 29 November 1978, the first AM since early August 1976 was issued.

Since November 1978 the Community has issued some 23 AMs, averaging approximately one per month. They provided the most thorough and considered judgments of the Community on anticipated developments and crises worldwide.

Concept and Philosophy (U)

(S) Notwithstanding the fact that there has been a period of discontinuity in use of the AM, the fundamental concept, philosophy, and essential features have remained generally consistent.[8] The purpose of the AM is to provide explicit warning of possible developments abroad which are of major concern to the United States. It is an interagency publication issued by the DCI on behalf of the Community. The AM focuses on specific information extracted from all intelligence sources, and delineates potential implications for consideration by national policymakers. Historically, extreme care has been taken to issue an AM only on those developments which should merit the attention and concern of national policymakers. Optimally, the AM is issued as early as possible in the developing situation, with a view towards providing warning rather than a prediction of potential developments and ramifications.

(U) Should there be a lack of unanimity as to the potential implications of the intelligence facts, dissenting views may be included. However, in actual practice rarely has there been a dissent to an AM. In addition to highlighting the intelligence facts and their implications, the AM also summarizes, in an evaluative way, the collection posture and capabilities of the Community and identifies actions underway or deemed necessary to ensure optimum coverage of the developing situation.

(S) Similarly, the general process for the issuance of an AM has changed only slightly since the inception of the vehicle.[9] Any member of the Community may initiate an AM but invariably it is proposed by the DCI, either through the NIO/W or the respective area/target NIO. Preparation of the initial draft is the responsibility of the appropriate NIO, who may solicit support and assistance from any element of the Community. The NIO coordinates with appropriate counterpart representatives of Community members before completing the draft. However, the DCI may authorize the NIO to limit or forego coordination if timeliness is a particularly critical factor. In

[5](U) Specifically, from 8 August 1976 to 28 November 1978 no AMs were issued.

[6](U) *Ibid.*

[7](S) The idea of an NIO for Warning had been suggested previously, some four years earlier during the initial meeting (19 September 1974) of the ad hoc committee convened to develop procedures for the AM. The DCI appointed Mr. Richard Lehman, an Associate Director of the National Foreign Assessment Center and a senior intelligence officer who had been involved previously in national warning activities, to be the first NIO/W.

[8](U) The initial statement of procedures promulgated 9 January 1975 was reviewed slightly and reissued on 15 December 1975. A more extensive revision was promulgated on 7 April 1980.

[9](S) For an analysis and critique of this process during the first year of early usage, specifically those AMs issued from September 1974 to August 1975, see "A Report on Intelligence Alert Memoranda," USIB-D-28.5/10, 22 October 1975.

either instance, the AM explicitly states the degree of coordination exercised by the NIO. Perhaps the most significant change to this process is the present practice by which the NIO/W provides advance notification to appropriate NFIB agencies of the intent to draft an AM. Further, the NIO will also direct the CIA Operations Center to convene a National Operations and Intelligence Watch Officers Net (NOIWON) conference to notify all concerned.

(C) From a cryptologist's perspective, NSA's participation in the AM process has been appropriate and meaningful. As a principal member of the Community, the Agency was represented at the working group discussions which culminated in the initial guidance and procedures. Subsequently, NSA has participated in all other Community deliberations regarding the process. In addition, with regard to actual implementation of the process, NSA SINIOs (Sigint National Intelligence Officers), who are designated to interact with the respective NIOs, are generally full participants in the process, consistent with the Agency's charter and mission. This has been especially true during the more recent period of usage.[10]

(C) Within NSA, the National Sigint Operations Center (NSOC) is the focal point for the handling of AMs.[11] NSOC, as the representative of the Agency in the NOIWON, receives notification and ensures that the Director and other senior managers and the appropriate SINIO and analytical elements are informed of the intent to issue an AM. Similarly, as appropriate, NSOC advises field activities as to ongoing actions related to the issuance of an AM. Coordination of the AMs and any substantive support required are normally provided by the appropriate SINIO through direct interaction with the respective NIO.

(S) It is suspected that, as a result of the mere passage of time and the concerted efforts of the Community, enhancements in both the process and the quality of AMs have evolved. Particularly impressive has been the array of potentially critical developments which have been the subject of AMs in recent years, [redacted] On these and other events the AMs issued during the past two years have provided Community assessments of the implications for U.S. interest of impending potential developments.

(S) In retrospect the Community assessments in many instances were remarkably accurate; the purpose of the AM was achieved. In light of the increased visibility accorded the "warning" function, the AM will perhaps accrue even greater prominence, significance, and utility should it endure as the national warning alarm.

(U) [redacted] has served as Chief, Office of Operations and Reporting (V3), which manages the NSOC, since June 1978. Prior to being Chief, he served as Deputy Chief and as an NSOC Senior Operations Officer [redacted] holds a BA in History from American University and a MPA from Harvard University.

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[10](U) At the outset of the initial period of usage, there were indications that Community participation was more selective and limited, depending at times on the individual NIO, the subject, and other factors.

[11](U) For a description of NSOC, see *Cryptologic Spectrum*, Summer 1979, pp. 4-15.