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The New National Sigint Requirements System: What It Means to NSA

The announcement that a new Sigint requirements system has been approved by the Director of Central Intelligence and the United States Intelligence Board (USIB) may be greeted at NSA with something less than hearty enthusiasm. Jaded by past efforts—most recently the Intelligence Guidance for Comint Programming, or IGCP (which, in some quarters, had taken on the character of an unpronounceable four-letter word)—we find ourselves caught between skepticism and the lingering optimism that any change has got to be an improvement. Really, how "new" *is* the new system? Will it work? How will it change what we have been doing—what will it mean to NSA?

To answer such questions, we need to place the new system in historical context and also in the framework of intelligence resources management. The National Sigint Requirements System (NSRS), as it is called, is the successor to a mechanism established in the middle 1960s and generally recalled as the work of the Bross Committee or "Gerry Pettibone's Group." The "Ad Hoc Review Group" (its proper name) spent two years identifying and studying the problems encountered by the Community in formulating, expressing, and levying requirements on the Comint source. They concluded that the prevailing practice among USIB member agencies was to place their Comint information requirements directly and unilaterally on NSA, without regard to the relative importance or priority of their subject matter, the technical feasibility of satisfaction, or the resources necessary for fulfillment.

Although it excluded Elint, that effort resulted in the creation of the Intelligence Guidance Subcommittee (IGS) as a permanent subcommittee of the USIB Sigint Committee. The IGS was to conduct an annual review of Comint (including telemetry) requirements, and issue, under USIB auspices, an annual IGCP. One part (Group B) of the IGCP was to represent USIB guidance for reporting, addressing each of the sub-elements of the Consolidated Cryptologic Program (CCP); the other (Group A) was to represent guidance on the technical base to be maintained for production, a feature offensive to NSA, and one which fell into disuse. While the principles which guided the IGS in its work were generally commendable, the clout necessary to enforce principles or to resolve differences was lacking. The relationship between the CCP-oriented IGCP and the "Priority National Intelligence Objectives" introduced in July 1966 was never clear, nor was there an indication of the relative importance of requirements, whether within or across sub-elements. Another subcommittee of the Sigint Committee addressed "Priorities for Elint Guidance" and formulated the draft "USIB Guidance for the National Reconnaissance Sigint Program," which covered a five-year period.

In November 1971 a Presidential directive set into motion a number of actions to improve the efficiency and economy of operations of the Intelligence Community in general, and of the cryptologic family in particular. Pertinent aspects of the DCI's response were noted in the Fall 1974 issue of *Cryptologic Spectrum* ("Requirements Can Drive the System"). In brief, DCI was given responsibility to develop a National Foreign Intelligence Program. National Intelligence Officers (NIOs) were given wide-ranging responsibility in designated target/subject areas, cutting across source disciplines. An Intelligence Community Staff was created. To strengthen DCI influence over resource considerations, an Intelligence Resources Advisory Committee (IRAC) complemented USIB. Committees of the USIB, among them the Sigint Committee, were designated to respond to

IRAC as well as USIB needs. From this revitalized and enlarged DCI staff came a five-year "Perspectives for Intelligence" as general guidance for planning; near-term guidance in the form of annual objectives, both resource and substantive, submitted by the DCI to the President; Key Intelligence Questions (KIQs), envisioned as 50-odd of the most pressing annual concerns of top-level decision makers; KIQ strategy reports—the proposed Community-wide response, orchestrated by the NIOs; the KIQ Evaluation Process (KEP), the annual report card on KIQs and the KIQ strategies; and various other incentives on the part of the IC staff and the USIB Committees.

As a part of the "new look," the Sigint Committee received a reaffirmation of its importance in DCI's plan. A letter of instruction to its chairman in October 1974, followed up by a new charter (DCID 6/1) in April 1975, underscored the importance of a new Sigint requirements and evaluation system and designated the Chairman of the Sigint Committee, in consultation with the NIOs, as the USIB coordinator for Intelligence Community requirements for Sigint. "Your prime function," the DCI had told the Chairman," is the identification of requirements and opportunities for Sigint coverage derived from those substantive needs of intelligence users to which Sigint can best contribute." He was told to re-work the Sigint requirements mechanism, to accommodate the overall guidance contained in "Perspectives" and "Objectives," to respond to the KIQs and to consumers of Sigint product both within and outside the Community. He was to challenge and revalidate the body of Sigint requirements. And he was to "close the loop" by establishing a means of judging the value of Sigint produced in response to these requirements.

Those instructions culminated in the approval by USIB on 25 September 1975 of a National Sigint Requirements System (NSRS), developed and recommended by the Sigint Committee. Those acquainted with its antecedents will find familiar features, for in many respects the new system is the product of evolutionary, rather than revolutionary, thinking. It does, however, contain several new features reflecting DCI's direction and the obvious shortcomings of the past.

—It provides for the approval of all Sigint requirements (Comint, Elint, Telint) within the USIB structure prior to any levy on the U.S. Sigint system (i.e., DIRNSA). (Exception is made for time-sensitive requirements in crisis situations: these can come directly to DIRNSA, with copies provided to the Sigint Committee.)

—Approved requirements are to be contained in the National Sigint Requirements List (NSRL).

—Requirements will be ordered in accordance with their importance—they will be "prioritized," taking into consideration the standing priorities of DCID 1/2, the Key Intelligence Questions, the uniqueness of Sigint as a source, and other factors.

—Requirements are to be expressed in Sigint terms, as much as possible (as opposed to separate statements of Comint, Elint, Telint needs), and arranged by logical target groupings, rather than by CCP sub-element, as in the CCP. The basic organization will be by country, and include, as applicable, categories dealing with political, military, economic, and science and technology. Special sections will deal with requirements which are world-wide or general in scope.

—Approved requirements will take note of, but not be tied to, available resources. This feature will give NSA the basis for program changes and other initiatives, such as research-and-development tasks.

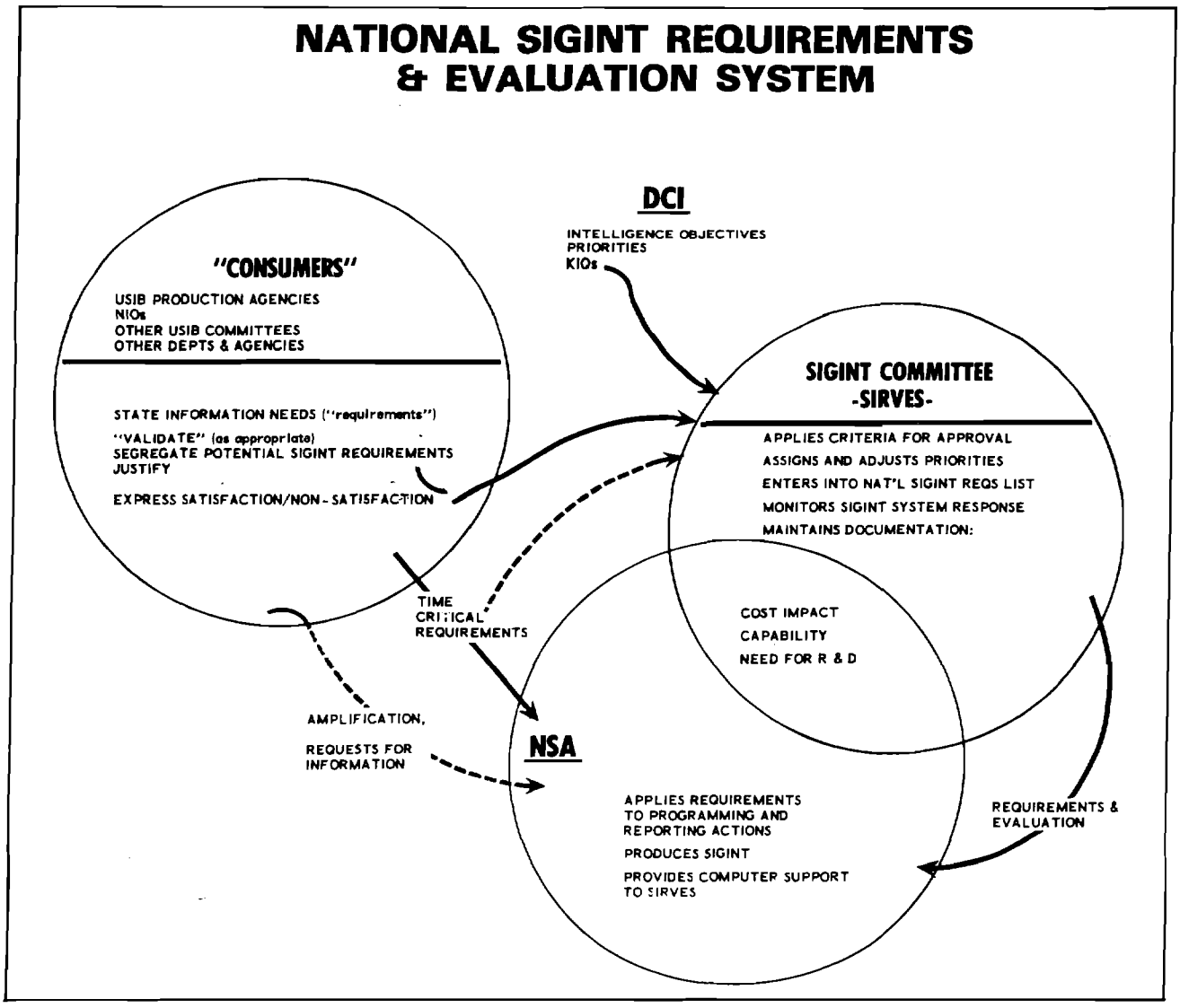
—Record will be kept of the rationale for the requirement, the validation and coordination aspects, and NSA's stated capability to respond, or intended course of action.

—Informal user—producer dialogue is encouraged in formulating expressions of information need, in amplifying approved requirements, and in requesting information already in NSA hands. The key consideration in such cases is that there be no adverse impact on Sigint resources.

—Evaluation of the response to the approved requirement will complement the validation and levying, closing the loop. Deficiencies would be addressed to the Director, NSA, for consideration in the National Sigint Plan, the CCP or for other action, as appropriate.

To usher in the new system—which will require a total review and restatement of Sigint requirements over the next year—a new subcommittee of the Sigint Committee, called SIRVES (Sigint Requirements Validation and Evaluation Subcommittee—"serves") has been approved by USIB, replacing the Intelligence Guidance Subcommittee (IGS) and the moribund Sigint Evaluation Subcommittee. SIRVES will have a small, permanent, professional staff, computer-supported by NSA to provide timely service. An *ad hoc* augmentation will perform the change-over into the NSRS. NSA interface with SIRVES will primarily involve V1 (Requirements and Directives), which is also the home of NSA's SIRVES member and is responsible for support of SIRVES, as well as internal aspects of requirements, management and product evaluation.

The shortcomings of past attempts have been obvious. Recent Congressional scrutiny has made us even more sensitive to the need for precision in the expression of requirements. (An example of the indefensible bad habits



which had crept into the IGCP is that catch-all requirement which appeared in so many cases: "Provide from in-depth analysis of Sigint material, special reports on topics selected by consumer agencies or by NSA in consultation with consumer agencies." Try and prove to a skeptical Congressman that that isn't license for some improper subject!)

While the new system aims to correct those past deficiencies and lends itself to new realities, no one pretends that the new system will be a panacea. If it moves us a step further along, it will be worthwhile. Even to accomplish that will require that we rid ourselves of outmoded thinking and dedicate ourselves to making the NSRS work. How important that is as a goal is self-evident, given the communications explosion in a world of shrinking Sigint assets and an ever-widening audience.

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