

A Mistake that Caused a Change November 16

Question: Did a mistake by McGeorge Bundy cause the replacement of the COMINT codeword DINAR?

COMINT codewords were part of the system used to identify and mark COMINT and SIGINT documents prior to adoption of the current system. Every page of a document containing COMINT would be stamped with the classification level, CONFIDENTIAL, SECRET, or TOP SECRET, with an accompanying five-letter word to alert indoctrinated readers to the source of the information in the document. This had begun during World War II with the codeword ULTRA and continued through the 1960s.

COMINT codewords switched periodically before settling on UMBRA, SPOKE, and MORAY in 1968. UMBRA denoted TOP SECRET information, SPOKE was SECRET, and MORAY was SECRET data from COMINT that could be sanitized and released to non-indoctrinated personnel who had a need to know.

Switches happened every few years, but one change was rumored to have happened because of a mistake by a high government official.

According to reporter David Wise, the COMINT codeword DINAR was abandoned because *New York Times Magazine*, on March 25, 1965, ran a photo of McGeorge Bundy holding a document whose title, "National Intelligence Bulletin, Daily Brief" and classification, TOP SECRET DINAR, were clearly visible.

The photo had been in the *New York Times* archives since August 1964, and a CIA officer visited the New York Times to recover the negative. DINAR was deprecated, at a cost of \$250,000, according to one of Wise's sources. (Bundy was the president's National Security Advisor.)

COMINT codewords were guarded closely at the time: incidents where COMINT codewords were spoken and in the clear over radio in 1953 and over an insecure phone line in 1954 led to high level responses. But the timing of the change from

DINAR in 1965 didn't really stand out from earlier changes, so the story looked dubious.

However, research with the CREST tool on CIA's public web site revealed a memorandum for the record from Lieutenant General Marshall Carter, USA, shortly before he left CIA to become DIRNSA.

The memorandum gives a summary of a conversation between Bundy and Carter, in which Bundy apologized for his slip, and Carter told him the codeword would be changed soon. The story is true.

Sources: David Wise, "The Politics of Lying," ISBN-0-394i-47932-7, pp 57-58.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-DP80B01676R00140003014-1.pdf>