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Cryptologic Almanac 50th Anniversary Series

The Central Security Service

(U) Among the eternal problems in American cryptology is the balance between centralization and decentralization or, expressed another way, between national direction of the SIGINT system or direction by local commanders. When this conflict over centralization arose in the immediate post-World War II era, the president came down clearly on the side of more centralization, leading to the creation of NSA in 1952.

(U) Money may or may not be the root of all evil, but it frequently is the root of governmental change. As the defense and intelligence communities grew during the world war and then again during the Cold War, senior government officials viewed greater centralization as a way to cut costs, eliminate duplication of effort, and achieve an economy of scale in expenditures.

(U) However, the senior leaders of the military services have recognized that communications intelligence (COMINT) has been an important component of success in battle, and have resisted any attempt to dilute their control of their service's COMINT assets. In combat, a commander needs to be able to deploy or redeploy his subordinate elements quickly. This includes COMINT elements.

(U) In 1949, the secretary of defense directed the formation of the Armed Forces Security Agency (AFSA) to provide central direction to COMINT and avoid costly duplication of effort by the Service Cryptologic Agencies (SCAs, as they were then called). Although the services resisted, when they lost the argument over centralization, they were at least able to console themselves that AFSA was subordinate to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and thus directly in the military chain of command.

(U) When dissatisfaction arose over AFSA in both the civilian and military leadership, President Harry S. Truman created the National Security Agency with more authority over tasking and deployment of cryptologic assets. Unlike AFSA, however, NSA was subordinated to the secretary of defense, with a mandate to serve "national" interests instead of only military.

(U) NSA, under the SecDef, and the SCAs, subordinate to their individual service chiefs, learned through experience to strike a balance between strategic and tactical needs in supporting decision makers through Cold War crises and shooting wars in Korea and

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Vietnam.

(U) In the early 1970s, as the United States was disengaging from Vietnam, and with the government confronting severe budget problems, President Richard M. Nixon looked for ways to achieve greater economy in government operations. Nixon, who always had had an uneasy relationship with the intelligence community, was also interested in reorganizing it.

(U) The Nixon administration created a panel, headed by Dr. James Schlesinger (then head of the Office of Management and Budget), to study U.S. intelligence organization, Schlesinger made a number of recommendations urging centralization in general, which ultimately led to creation of the Intelligence Community Staff. More to the point, he further recommended that NSA and the SCAs be consolidated, with the SCAs taken out of the military chain of command.

(U) President Nixon accepted the recommendation and announced in November 1971 that the administration intended to create a unified "National Cryptologic Command" under NSA. The new command, to be under the director, NSA, was to come into existence by January 1, 1972.

(U) The director of NSA was Vice Admiral Noel Gayler. He was a hero of the naval air campaigns of World War II, and had a wide-ranging postwar career in the Navy. In addition to a tour as naval aide to the secretary of the navy, he had commanded the attack carrier Ranger. After attaining flag rank in 1960, he had been naval attaché in London, and assistant chief of naval operations for development. He was appointed director of NSA in August 1969. Admiral Gayler knew little about intelligence activities, but a lot about command and control.

(U) The service chiefs were apprehensive about President Nixon's instruction to create the National Cryptologic Command. Unification of COMINT activities under NSA would deprive them of control over many critical tactical assets. Some feared that NSA might do away with tactical operations to concentrate on national missions. The services also did not wish to relinquish their traditional authority over training and career development of their troops.

(U) In response to this concern, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird told Admiral Gayler in late December that the new organization would be called the "Central Security Service" rather than a command. Laird instructed Gayler to change the organizational plans and gave him until February 1, a month later than President Nixon had stipulated for the new arrangement. This was still a very short deadline for the size of the task.

(U) The new arrangement received its charter in a revision of NSCID 6, the document that

gives basic authority to American cryptologic activities. The Central Security Service (CSS) was defined as SIGINT activities of the military services, but the inclusiveness was left ambiguous. Under this new version of NSCID 6, the mobile, or tactical, cryptologic elements, i.e., the SCAs, remained under military control. The director of NSA, however, did receive stronger authority over tasking, logistics, research, career development of personnel, and training.

(U) The CSS plan drawn up by Gayler and his staff for Secretary Laird essentially left major structural matters as they were. CSS would comprise NSA and the SCAs; the SCAs had the resources, CSS would operate the system. Most details of the systems actual operations were left for future resolution.

(U) The phrase "dual-hat" came to be used quite a lot at this time. Admiral Gayler now wore two, director of NSA and chief of the Central Security Service. But, because of a scarcity of billets, CSS did not get an independent staff; therefore, a majority of the some 200 staff personnel for CSS were NSA employees, "dual-hatted." General John Morrison, then assistant director for production (equivalent to today's SID), the senior general officer next to DIRNSA, became chief of CSS operations.

(U) For the next months, NSA seniors and seniors in the services and SCAs struggled to sort out questions of authority and research. Admiral Gayler sought to have SCA theater offices collocate with the senior NSA/CSS offices, and also integrate other functions. The SCAs opposed this, and most senior U.S. military commanders supported their opposition. DIRNSA/CSS also won operational control over some collection assets when it could be demonstrated they were performing "national" missions, but most theater assets remained under their previous commands.

(U) The Nixon administration, which had proposed the great centralization, was unable to follow through with critical support. Nixon and his senior officials were soon preoccupied with the unfolding scandal known as "Watergate," and many of their organizational initiatives languished, CSS among them.

(U) It was announced in August 1972 that Admiral Gayler was to receive his fourth star and had been selected to be Commander-in-Chief Pacific. He thus became the first DIRNSA to be promoted to four-star rank, the first to get a post-NSA assignment. Rumors ran through the civilian work force -- which did not know about Secretary Laird's orders or the severe service response to the CSS plan -- that Gayler had been rewarded for sabotaging the new organization.

(U) In this atmosphere of doubt, Admiral Gayler at one point turned to one of his civilian assistants and said, "I'll bet some people think I sold out CSS to get my fourth star."

(U) "That's not true, Admiral," his assistant replied. And, after a pause, he added drolly, "Everybody thinks that."

(U) (Decades after the fact, asked about this charge, Admiral Gayler replied with a common euphemism for "baloney.")

(U) Gayler's successor as DIRNSA/CSS was Lieutenant General Samuel Phillips, USAF. General Phillips also was a combat veteran of World War II, and had had subsequent assignments principally in missile and space programs. Like Gayler, he had little experience in intelligence work, but he had considerable leadership ability. (General Phillips also went on to a fourth star and a key assignment after his term as DIRNSA.)

(U) General Phillips, as chief of CSS, sought to have SCA headquarters co-locate themselves with NSA at Fort Meade. As a plan, it looked like an excellent way to consolidate staffs and save money. As a reality, it was unworkable. The SCAs were unwilling to relocate and made the case that they needed to remain closer to their service headquarters. The plan also foundered on the simple fact that office space was unavailable in sufficient quantity at Fort Meade. Many of those who were serving as CSS staff at NSA doffed their Dual Hats and moved to other assignments.

(U) Thus, in the immediate aftermath of the creation of CSS, it seemed quite possible that the Central Security Service would exist strictly on paper.

(U) However, despite the strong initial opposition, over time CSS began to work. One of the early successes was in the matter of training. Frank Austin, commandant of the National Cryptologic School, worked hard to develop common standards for cryptologic tasks and achieve greater centralization of training functions. He helped bring about a system in which each of the SCAs served as executive agent for particular aspects of a system for all of CSS.

(U) Starting with Gayler, but continued by his successors, the DIRNSA began regular meetings with the SCA chiefs. The DIRNSAs gradually cultivated a closer-knit system among geographically separated components.

(U) It took more than a hopeful plan to create a working CSS. What paper couldn't create, actual practice did. Over time, the chiefs of the SCAs began to realize that the advantages of CSS as a system greatly outweighed the loss of authority involved. CSS waxed and waned with different DIRNSAs but emerged in the 1990s as an effective system for NSA-SCA cooperation in the national interest.

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