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NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY
FORT GEORGE G. MEADE, MARYLAND 20755

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Subject: Interview with Mr. Arthur McCafferty, White House Staff, on the use of SIGINT in shaping W.H. decisions on Southeast Asia

Present: Miss Jeanne-Renee Jones, Dr. David Y. McManus, and Mr. Arthur McCafferty

Direct White House Use of SIGINT

SIGINT reaches the W.H. in two forms: as a direct product from NSA and as "finished" intelligence -- CIB's, USIB Watch Reports, and other documents produced as a joint effort of the Intelligence Community. Although the sum of these is necessary to provide the President with a foundation upon which to base his decisions on Southeast Asia, the President and his Intelligence Advisory Staff have felt reluctant to depend heavily on "finished" intelligence. A number of reasons exist for this reluctance. "Finished" intelligence does not and probably never will succeed in producing the quick reaction capability needed by the President. The "finished" intelligence disseminated by the Washington community, moreover, obscures the sense of urgency often felt in Saigon, and also obscures the identity of the sources of information. It does not reveal the large volume of data on which the intelligence judgments have been made, and volume of data is frequently indicative of the validity of the intelligence. Finished intelligence, finally, is always at best second hand.

Declassified and approved for release by NSA on 11-21-2005 pursuant to E.O. 12958, as amended

For these reasons, the W.H. staff personally reviews "raw" intelligence (a term defined as being the original source intelligence material as it is received from the collector before undergoing the digestive processes of the Intelligence Community). By reviewing the raw product, the President can gain the sense of the material, form his own informal opinion, formulate alternative courses of action, compare his opinion with the formal net judgment of the Intelligence Community when this is received, and finally make his formal decision, which is then the result of his own consideration of the raw product combined with the judgment of the Intelligence Community.

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An example of this process occurred during the Tet offensive of early 1968. Before the offensive and before receiving "finished intelligence, the President had formed an opinion based on raw product that the Viet Cong would change their tactics from a war of attrition to assaulting key cities and thus achieve a better press, if nothing else. The Tet offensive therefore came as no surprise, and the President gained insight into this change of tactics on a very timely basis by reviewing SIGINT provided directly to the WH.

Mechanics of SIGINT transmittal to the WH

The transmittal of the raw SIGINT product from NSA to the WH is regulated through quasi-formal liaison. When originally requested by the National Security Council to provide SIGINT support to the WH in this direct fashion, NSA assigned a civilian staff member as liaison officer with the WH. This liaison officer currently ascertains the needs of the WH and, as required, serves as an advisor on questions concerning the interpretation, clarification, and safeguarding of SIGINT product being transmitted directly to the WH. In some cases, the requirement calls for routine or periodic reports, in some cases it is for aperiodic reports, and in still other cases the need may be for a one-time report.

SIGINT product is currently passed directly to the WH by four secure communications systems: CRITICOMM (teleprinter); LSX (Long-distance Xerography) relayed through the National Military Command Center, Pentagon; Presidential Secure Voice Network (KY-3); and AUTOSEVOCOM (Automated Secure Voice Communications).

Normally NSA has responsibility for selecting the subject matter of the SIGINT material transmitted to the WH, but WH retains the prerogative of requiring NSA responses on SIGINT in the NSA inventory that may relate to a developing situation or to events observed by the WH in other sources of intelligence.

WH Processing of SIGINT

The President's Intelligence Advisory Staff has the function of reviewing SIGINT, along with other sources of intelligence, for items meriting Presidential attention. The Advisory Staff finds SIGINT more

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readily assimilable than other forms of "raw" intelligence since it comes to the WH accompanied by a NSA technical assessment of the content. Items selected for Presidential attention are analyzed and summarized for presentation to the President in the form of oral or written briefings. If there should be SIGINT data of outstanding significance, it is passed to him in its original form.

From time to time, and often stimulated by SIGINT received, the WH intelligence staff prepared "think pieces." These are transmitted to the President clearly designated as "think pieces" so that the President will withhold a formal decision until receiving the Intelligence Community assessment. The WH "think" document is circulated among members of the Community either to generate a community evaluation in the case of a subject not yet under community consideration or to stimulate the community to quicker response in the case of a subject already under community review. The use of the WH "think pieces" is in addition to, not in disharmony with, the normal Community assessment procedures conducted in response to WH requirements.

Examples of WH use of SIGINT

Direct use of SIGINT at the WH began at the time of the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964. The significance of this event was such that the WH minutely scrutinized all available intelligence having even the most remote relevance. The decision to retaliate or not to retaliate lay in determination of DRV intent or nonintent to attack. SIGINT alone provided the positive evidence of DRV premeditation and was instrumental in shaping the President's decision to retaliate. In September 1964, another "incident" took place in the Gulf of Tonkin. Absence of SIGINT in this case led to the WH conclusion that the DRV had not preplanned any deliberate action in the Gulf of Tonkin at that time. Based on this NSA negative position voiced by DIRNSA, the President decided that the U.S. forces would not retaliate after the September incident.

Violation of CHICOM air space by U.S. aircraft

SIGINT influenced Presidential statements answering the aperiodic Communist Chinese claims of U.S. violations of its border. In response to Communist Chinese public complaints, the U.S. military forces concerned, on occasion, denied the violations on the basis of pilot statements, and other sources. To resolve doubts SIGINT, in the form of intercepted [redacted] North Vietnamese tracking of hostile (U.S.) aircraft, served

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to adjudicate the opposing claims and to guide the President on issuing statements on this issue, enabling the President to accept or deny U.S. culpability. The WH considered that SIGINT has helped to prevent the unintentional involvement of Communist China officially in the Vietnam war.

North Vietnamese Infiltration

SIGINT on North Vietnamese infiltration of South Vietnam has become a routine input to the WH. Before and during the 1964-65 infiltration of the North Vietnam (NVN) 325th Division into South Vietnam, the WH had not been following pure SIGINT; rather, at that time the WH was using two sources: MACV reports from the field and the "finished" product of the Intelligence Community incorporating SIGINT. At that time the WH was dependent upon the formal Washington intelligence community for assessment and was also just beginning to become acquainted with individual types of primary intelligence such as SIGINT. In addition, at that time WH interest in infiltration was in the fact of infiltration and SIGINT was only one of several sources that demonstrated this fact. Between the time of the 325th Division infiltration and the infiltration of the 304th and 320th Divisions in late 1967 and early 1968, the WH accepted the infiltration figures established by MACV. During the infiltration of the 304th and the 320th Divisions, the WH learned to use SIGINT and the cryptologic agencies achieved success in exploiting the NVN infiltration communications. As a result, the WH came to rely solely upon SIGINT in assessing the number of infiltrators coming into South Vietnam from the north.

The advances of SIGINT technology of 1968 also have provided a sizeable input to White House Order-of-Battle bookkeeping. Prior to the Tet Offensive of early 1968 SIGINT had been producing a sizeable input concerning location, identification, and numbering of enemy forces within SVN. Following the Tet Offensive, the cryptologic success during March 1968 increased White House dependence upon SIGINT for Order-of-Battle to 90%.

Other Uses of SIGINT

SIGINT serves the WH in a number of other ways. [redacted] traffic is scanned for information on the NVN internal economic situation and for the extent of North Vietnam's dependence on the Eurasian Communist bloc countries. Content of exploitable [redacted] communications and traffic analytic results from unexploitable [redacted] communications provide valuable insights into peace probes. At times, SIGINT fills gaps

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in intelligence coverage normally provided by other sources such as photographic intelligence (PHOTOINT) and human intelligence (HUMINT). In the Spring of 1968, SIGINT evidence of an enemy road-building project between Ashau and the sea, with its implied threat to the city of Hue, was a case in point. SIGINT information on occasion helped the U.S. avoid politically embarassing situations. Upon learning through SIGINT of the proposed visit [redacted] to Hanoi, the WH directed a cessation of bombing until departure of the delegation could be ascertained. Finally, SIGINT helped the WH deal with Congress during the early 1968 Congressional investigation of the Gulf of Tonkin affair. Relevant SIGINT was exhumed and presented to Congress. The WH viewed this presentation of SIGINT as having been instrumental in satisfying Congress as to the incontestability of North Vietnam's preplanning the attacks on U.S. forces in the Gulf of Tonkin in August 1964.

Outlook for continued SIGINT utilization by WH

The WH expects that SIGINT will be a prime source of intelligence if and when agreements are produced as a result of present peace negotiations. It will be necessary to confirm Viet Cong/North Vietnamese de-escalation. Here again, absence of SIGINT on Vietnamese Communist planning and movements, may provide the needed negative indicator that the Vietnamese Communists are, in fact, de-escalating.

Jeanne-Dukée Jones