



(U//FOUO) Letter to the Editor: Can Only an 'Expert's Expert' Write SIGINT Assessments?

FROM: the editor
Unknown
Run Date: 12/20/2005

(U//FOUO) A reader sent in a question inspired by the article [Big "A", Little "p" -- A&P's Assessment Reports](#), and the Chief of the SIGINT Assessment Cell responds:

Comment: (S//SI) As a senior analyst, I am all for assessment reports. I write at least 4 a year on my target -- the UN's insight into Iraq's political transition. But I also firmly believe that a good assessment report can only be written by a substantive target expert who is at the top of their game on the target--not just SIGINT, but other INTs as well.

(S//SI) So, my question for the new cell is this: while I appreciate your mission to foster cross-PL [Product Line] teaming to generate more and better assessment reporting and stimulate innovative thinking, I am wondering how the members of this cell are going to produce assessment reports on their own? I have asked this question before and gotten no answer, which leads me to believe that you haven't quite figured that bit out yet. I caution you to tread carefully before actually writing an assessment report unless you are the "experts' expert" on the target in question. Otherwise, you will fall into the trap of summarizing and not assessing.

-- [REDACTED]

(U//FOUO) Here's a response from [REDACTED], Chief of the SIGINT Assessment Cell:

(U//FOUO) From Carl Johnson's SID *today* article "Big 'A'; Little 'p' - Assessment Reports," concerns were voiced about the capability of someone other than the "experts' expert" writing a good assessment report.

(U//FOUO) As the lead for the SIGINT Assessment Cell effort, I share that concern. I believe it would be nearly impossible for the SIGINT Assessment Cell to write traditional SIGINT Assessment Reports on targets and issues with which they lack expertise. The mission of the SIGINT Assessment Cell is to rethink the concept of SIGINT assessment reports and develop new ways to share insights. The Cell does not produce anything in a vacuum. Collaboration with the real target experts is the core of their process, working for the dual purpose of insight for the customer and insight in developing new methods to leverage the wisdom of analysts across the SIGINT system.

(S//SI) Two recent reports produced by the Cell exemplify this process - one was on worldwide reaction to the avian flu, and the other was on SIGINT indicators of the threat of terrorist for the end of the year holiday period. In both cases, the Cell engaged in a dialogue early with the target experts, developed an analytical plan of attack, and collaborated with those experts to develop relatively short, focused, well-informed intelligence products. The products were more than a summary - by leveraging the wisdom of a variety of target experts, we collectively added valuable insight to the data by looking at multiple streams of reporting systemically, instead of as a collection of discrete reports. In both cases, target experts added critical input and nuances to the conclusions reached by the Cell - resulting in a much better product.

(U//FOUO) The SIGINT Assessment Cell operates dynamically, learning and reapplying insights across the system. We have opportunities for senior analysts to rotate through the Cell for limited detail assignments. This assignment will provide relief from the daily pressures of keeping up with their targets and re-focus on key intelligence questions, develop ways to share their expertise, produce the results in SIGINT assessment reports, and impact the future of Assessment Reporting community wide.

(U//FOUO) Stay tuned for our new website which will provide more information and examples on the evolution of Assessment Reporting and the progress of the Assessment Cell. We will put an announcement in *SID today* .

"(U//FOUO) SIDtoday articles may not be republished or reposted outside NSANet without the consent of S0121 ([DL sid comms](#))."

DYNAMIC PAGE -- HIGHEST POSSIBLE CLASSIFICATION IS
TOP SECRET // SI / TK // REL TO USA AUS CAN GBR NZL
DERIVED FROM: NSA/CSSM 1-52, DATED 08 JAN 2007 DECLASSIFY ON: 20320108