



(S) How SIGINT Helped Liberate an American Hostage in Iraq

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(S) You may have seen a recent "60-Minutes" broadcast that told the story of Roy Hallums, an American freed recently after being held hostage in Iraq for 10 months. What you didn't see, however, was the story of how SIGINT played a major role in his release.

(U) Mr. Hallums worked as a contractor for a Saudi company that supplied food to the Iraqi Army. On November 1, 2004 insurgents attacked the firm's Baghdad office and a shoot-out ensued. When the dust had cleared, one Iraqi guard and one insurgent lay dead, and Mr. Hallums and several of his coworkers had been captured.


(U) Hallums held hostage (Reuters)


(U) Roy Hallums going home (Reuters)

(TS//SI//REL) In the ensuing months, there were times when no one was even sure that Mr. Hallums was alive. Then, in the summer of 2005, hostage negotiators asked for a ransom payment for his release, probably prompted by Mr. Hallums' declining health. Meanwhile, SIGINTers at Fort Meade, NSA/CSS Georgia, and personnel deployed to Iraq were exhaustively analyzing a mountain of communications related to groups in Iraq that might have ties to the kidnapers.

(TS//SI//REL) In July of this year, the Cryptologic Support Team (CST) for the 3rd Infantry Division began tracking a group known as the Abu Salih Group (ASG), which has extensive ties to al-Qa'ida. Through coordination with Special Collection Service Baghdad and NSA/CSS Georgia, the CST identified mobile phone handsets that appeared to be involved in previous kidnappings in Iraq. Despite the fact that these individuals regularly change phones and internal SIM cards, the CST developed the target to a detailed level and, on 29 August, passed the information to our National Intelligence Support Team with the Special Forces.

(TS//SI//REL) Analysts at the NIST managed to conclusively link ASG to the earlier negotiations to free Mr. Hallums. Furthermore, they concluded that the people posing as middlemen were actually the hostage-takers themselves -- people who were aware of Hallums' location! The NIST briefed this information to the Task Force commander, who proceeded to launch several key Special Forces operations that netted several members of ASG.

(S) One of these detainees was an ASG affiliate named Abu Muhammad. Using the SIGINT analysis to steer their interrogation, FBI interrogators learned from him that Hallums was still alive and being held at an unspecified farmhouse. Further arrests and interrogations bore fruit: on 7 September a detainee provided the precise location south of Baghdad where Hallums was being held. A rescue operation was launched immediately, and U.S. troops broke into the farmhouse, setting Hallums free.

(U//FOUO) The very next day, 8 September, Mr. Hallums penned the following note of thanks:


(U//FOUO) Note from Roy Hallums. It reads:

"Dear NIST, Please accept my most grateful thanks for all of your work on my case. Your devotion to my case helped greatly to my eventual rescue. I will be forever grateful for all of your help. -- Roy Hallums, Sept 8, 2005"

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