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The Sigint Users' Handbook

What's an Ishtar?

Few NSA employees are aware that since April 1974 a growing body of Sigint-related information has been appearing under the title *Sigint Users' Handbook*. Inasmuch as it is distributed narrowly, even within the DDO organization, and is essentially "uncoordinated," few analysts know that it exists. This should not be surprising, however, for the *Handbook* is, obviously, intended for the delectation of Sigint users (also known as consumers or customers) rather than Sigint producers.

There have been two relatively similar predecessors to the *Handbook*—a long-lived series entitled "INFO-CON" (Information for Consumers) and a series called "Notice to Users" (an interim step between the INFO-CON and the present *Handbook*). Like the MUSSO system and other current vehicles of NSA direction, the INFOCON program suffered from lack of staff attention, lack of interest on the part of NSA managers, and a degree of executive resistance to the whole idea. For whatever reasons, INFOCONs became tired, out-of-date, and of little value to those they were intended to serve. Only the users of Sigint and those most intimately involved with them, NSA field elements, tried—unsuccessfully—to breathe life into the moribund body.

With the development of a system of United States Signals Intelligence Directives (USSID) which changed, and reflected changes in, the ways we supported the outside world, it was obvious to the Sigint Directives element (now V13) that the INFOCONs should be reissued or canceled.

A home for them was hard to find. The old P2 organization, which included a "customer relations" function, felt that P1 ought to do something. P1 thought that the effort was "educational," and that the National Cryptologic School should be responsible. The School was unimpressed with that argument. P2 finally got the job, but could not come to grips with the major policy

issue—whether an entire package must be presented to the users or whether the job could be done piecemeal. Because of this obstacle, little was done.

There was, however, effective executive resistance to perpetuating a body of Sigint information in a formal, structured sense for the education of readers of product or the beneficiaries of Sigint support. This view was based on the entirely reasonable position that the more users knew of "Sigint Production Information" (see USSID 300), the more likely they would be to act to take over the responsibility of DIRNSA to manage the Sigint activities of the United States. It was the view of senior executives that little information about Sigint need be in the hands of the users, and that what was needed could be handled by *ad hoc* memoranda, letters and messages. As is normal, of course, and as soon as it was convenient and safe, this policy guidance was ignored, and the *Sigint Users' Handbook* was developed by V2 (now V12).

To a large extent, the rationale for the *Handbook* is the same as for Cryptologic Support Groups. Each has a task of "interpreting Sigint," advising the user how and in what form product and other Sigint support can be made available to him, and, in a generally non-technical context, explaining to him the methodologies, procedures, conventions and systems by which Sigint is produced and distributed. Particularly within the military community, it has long been true that intelligence assignments are short, and the opportunity and inclination to study and understand the arcane ways of the US Sigint System are limited.

After the Yom Kippur War the Director of DIA observed that many of his analysts were unable to handle and understand Sigint. A useful partial answer to that problem has been a series of one-week Sigint orientation classes for DIA analysts, given by the National Cryptologic School. The *Handbook* is used as a working reference in this program.

An interesting sidelight on the classes is the result of a questionnaire given to the DIA analysts at the start of the program. One question asks what the word "ISHTAR" means on our product. Perhaps 2 percent of the students

Here is an example of a "flag" intended to advise the users of something, but few of the users understand its significance. The *Handbook* tells them that it's something other than an ancient fertility goddess.

The *Users' Handbook* is based primarily on the "300" series of USSID—the basic *Handbook* to a great extent upon USSID 300 itself. Annexes to the Handbook (proposed or in-being) discuss Sigint support to OPSEC, COINS, Specified Sigint Direct Service, SOLIS, ELINT product, a glossary of Sigint terms, etc.

Annex A, on the Topic and Area Guides (TAG), was issued on 9 December. This annex illustrates the type of information that must be available to the product reader. If we judge that "TAG   " is useful on the product to assist the user in dissemination and retrival of the information, it is rather vital that he know what the code means. (Found in USSID 315.) We have drafted an annex (Annex H) on Sigint sanitization which is courageous and feisty and competes with DoD Manual 5200.17 (M2) and CIA's Communications Intelligence Security Regulation.   of V12 was author of the *Handbook*.)

The Handbook has become a "best seller" in the user community. DIA conducted a survey of DoD Sigint users last summer and observed:

"The *Sigint Users' Handbook* is a very valuable guide for all Sigint users,, particularly intelligence analytical personnel. Experienced analysts find the *Handbook* a very useful reference document; it is invaluable to the new or inexperienced analyst as an information guide and tool relevant to Sigint operations. In this vein, it can be used for indoctrinating new personnel relative to the various Sigint reporting vehicles, retrieval systems, general composition of Sigint product and concepts of Sigint support and operations. The *Handbook* can be viewed as the Sigint "primer," and for the new or undoctrinated, supplements knowledge of Sigint acquired through the NSA orientation/familiarization courses."

(A word of caution. Although geared to the USSID's, the *Handbook* is not a suitable replacement for those documents in respect to Sigint producers. Nor, although we hope it is accurate, is the *Handbook* a reference that can be used safely to pass tests.)

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