



(U//FOUO) The Washington Liaison Office: Who Are Those Guys?

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Q: What do SIGINT and mad cows have in common?

A: Both are of critical interest to the U.S. Department of Agriculture

(U//FOUO) When you think of SIGINT customers, who comes to mind? The Pentagon, the military commands, State Department, the White House? Would you think to include the Environmental Protection Agency, the Export-Import Bank, or the Department of Health and Human Services on your list of regular readers?

(U//FOUO) These and several other federal agencies fall into a category of non-Intelligence Community, non-DOD customers that do not need full-time NSA liaison reps but that do, nevertheless, depend on SIGINT to make key decisions. The Washington Liaison Office, affectionately known as the WLO, services these customers from its location in the U.S. Secret Service building in downtown Washington, D.C. The WLO consists of two liaison officers whose primary mission is to tend to the SIGINT needs of the following active customers:

- Department of Agriculture
- Department of Health & Human Services
- Department of Interior
- Department of Transportation
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Export-Import Bank
- Federal Aviation Administration
- Federal Communications Commission
- Federal Reserve System
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration

(U//FOUO) What makes the WLO different than other embedded liaison offices is first and foremost the fact that it is not co-located with any of its customers. Another significant difference is that the WLO's customers usually have competing priorities totally unknown to each other requiring a delicate balancing act in providing timely SIGINT to all. For example, what the Secretary of Agriculture needs for her afternoon meeting with EU representatives is completely different from what the NASA Administrator needs prior to his visit to India.

(U//FOUO) On a daily basis, the WLO officers reassess priorities based on international, national, departmental, and NSA events to maintain this delicate balance among the customers with an objective of each customer believing its crisis is the WLO's #1 priority. Similar to NCRs and SIGINT Liaison Officers, the WLO also acts as a conduit to all of NSA's resources, including counterintelligence, security, IT, and information assurance.

(S//SI) The subject-matter interests of these many customers are quite diverse and provide outstanding opportunities to learn about topics from bovine spongiform encephalopathy to space launch vehicle capabilities; from narcotics interdiction techniques to wine labeling regulations; from toxin delivery technologies to secure communications options, and much, much more. The WLO has regular interaction with TOPIs* from ten of the twelve SID Product Lines.

(U//FOUO) A day in the life of a WLO officer includes, of course, reviewing SIGINT for time-sensitive reporting of interest to all customers in the portfolio. As in any liaison position, it is only after building personal relationships with the many customers that a WLO rep gets to know not only the intelligence needs of each and every customer but also their individual briefing preferences. For example, some customers prefer to read entire reports; some, such as U.S. Cabinet members, prefer short, summarized briefings.

(U) Once the daily reporting is reviewed, selections made, and briefings prepared, the WLO team effects delivery in time for action. Since most of these non-intel agencies have small, if any, intelligence-support staffs and very limited secure-communication capabilities, delivery of SIGINT in a timely manner most often involves a Metro ride. WLO customers are spread out all over downtown, the closest being about six blocks from the WLO office, a very nice walk on a spring or fall day.

(U) There are numerous fringe benefits to a position at the WLO: getting trim and fit walking around downtown every day, learning esoteric tidbits, engaging in discussions with senior Administration officials, and getting first-hand feedback on the significance of NSA reporting.

(U) SIGINT is critical to these customers and there are success stories from each and every one. Look for future articles on specific departments that the WLO supports. In the meantime, if you think you have a product or service that might be of interest to these little-known customers, or if you think they have something that might be of interest to you, contact [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. A convenient list of all of SID's customer liaison representatives, including the WLO officers, can be found at [REDACTED].

*(U) Notes:

TOPI = Target Office of Primary Interest

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