



(U//FOUO) Seeing into the Global SIGINT System - A View from the Field

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SID's Technical Director gives his insights from the recent SID leadership trip to Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan (U//FOUO)

(TS//SI) I'm sitting in Bagram Airbase at the CJTF-76 (Combined Joint Task Force) CSG element and reflecting on what I've heard so far in my visits in Iraq, Qatar, and up the road here in Bagram at JIATF CSG.

(TS//SI) A common theme is the importance of complete visibility for every member of the global SIGINT system to all the information across Cryptologic enterprise and our partners' spaces, and "ubiquitous" access to every other member of the global SIGINT system working in the same target space. Or to put it another way, transparency and collaboration across the SIGINT network. The value of this, of course, is that as we increase our ability to share information and expertise, each and every member of the SIGINT system is able to make better decisions; decisions on where to focus, what to analyze, who to team with, when to engage, and how to make it all relevant and useful.

(U//FOUO) Every unit we've met with on this trip is making great use of the NSA databases they have access to and building networks across geographic and organizational boundaries. However, they don't have the means to share all of the deeply insightful information they are gathering from their local customers and partners with the rest of the SIGINT system. Of course, we've been talking about this for a while, but this TDY has made it clear to me that there are key steps we can and should take to advance these concepts in real-world practical ways. I'd like to explore some thoughts that I've had during this trip about how to achieve greater levels of practical transparency.

(U//FOUO) In my view there are four significant challenges to getting to those greater levels of transparency. It begins with easy and effective means to **capture** the actions, decisions, and threats that our customers and partners are facing. But it doesn't stop with our customer information; it also extends to our analysis, tasking, SIGDEV, access insights, and more. Database access is the tip of the iceberg. What is equally important is capturing the informal insights into our customers' operations and unobtrusively mining their target knowledge and views to incorporate into our own decisions and actions. Based on this TDY, I'm convinced that there are many ways to accomplish this. Among those many ways, those which leverage the information repositories and processes already in use will likely be the most practical and quickest to deliver.

(U//FOUO) We must also retain the **context** in which our actions, decisions, and threats are expressed. For our customers, understanding this context drives to the heart of what our CSGs*, CSTs*, fusion centers, and tactical SIGINTers are so good at. The



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7. [MGQ's Notes from the Field - Part 3](#)
8. [Summing Up the Trip](#)
9. [The Trip in Photos](#)
10. Seeing into the Global SIGINT System - A View from the Field

same goes for the decisions and issues each of us face each day. Unfortunately, the means to express these perceptions to the rest of the SIGINT system are largely lacking. The good news is that I've seen and heard lots of great ideas from the SIGINTers we've been visiting that show some promising starting points. We need to give these teams and others across the SIGINT system the resources to explore these ideas and then be able to apply them elsewhere in the SIGINT System when it makes sense.

(U) Once we've gathered all of this information, making it **available** to the entire global SIGINT system is the next challenge. This seems to be largely a technical issue, but one that cannot be realistically solved through a centralized, top-down design. Instead, simple tools that leverage data federation, enable data discovery, and provide dynamic access control in a decentralized way will make it possible for this data to become available across the enterprise.

(U) That leads us to the fourth challenge: precision **delivery** that presents additional information to the right person at the right time. Only with this last step will we realize the promise of all this new information to improve the decisions made by each and every SIGINTer. While difficult, this problem is not impossible. Rather we need to look more closely at how each of us operate today and use it to find related information. Our actions and interactions with databases, web spaces, and analytic tools offers a good source for finding more about what we need. By connecting our actions with data-mining tools, we can start to bring related information to light. We can even begin to automatically identify communities of interest, forming self-organizing collaborative networks (but that's a topic for another day).

(U//FOUO) The good news is that many efforts in our expeditionary SIGINT units and everywhere else across the SIGINT system are advancing these concepts by necessity. We've not yet begun to identify and leverage their successes across the global system, but I think this is an area we can quickly fix and build upon the focus, energy, and ingenuity of our SIGINTers around the world. Today they are the pioneers in the evolution of expeditionary SIGINT. Their efforts continue to push us forward into an environment where we share information and expertise across the SIGINT system. I am indebted to everyone who has spent their time during this TDY exploring this topic with me and the commitment and sacrifice they are making for our nation!

*(U) Notes:

CSG = Cryptologic Services Group
CST = Cryptologic Support Team

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