



## **(U) Comments on COMMENTS -- Analysts Weigh In**

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(U//FOUO) The recent articles [\(U\) SIGINT Reporting: The Right Stuff](#) and [\(U\) No Comment](#) asked for ideas on how to get more analytic commentary into SIGINT reports. What did people have to say?

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(U//FOUO) Most people seemed to agree that providing more insight based on facts is something that NSA should strive to produce. That is, as long as we are providing insights with value, versus "checking the box." I asked Cindy Farkus to address some of the overarching concerns from the feedback. Her comments will be featured on *SID today* tomorrow, but I wanted to provide a summary of the feedback.

### **(U) In the past, including more than the facts was discouraged**

(U//FOUO) [REDACTED] who is now in the private sector but started his career 30 years ago as a reporter, wrote in and told me that one of the barriers to including insights into reports is that it goes against the "warnings that were drummed into all reporters 30 years ago: just report the SIGINT; the guys at CIA will take it from there" and even went as far as to say that "including comments was always an unnatural act for analysts."

### **(U) Fear of being wrong**

(U//FOUO) Several people wrote to me about how they feared retribution for being wrong. They either shared stories that happened to them or cautionary tales of those that they worked closely with. A few were worried about accounting for the analysts' experience at the job.

### **(U) Mixed customer reaction**

(U//FOUO) A few weren't sure when to include insights because it would not be relevant for the entire customer base. One individual reported that they had customers who loved the comments, but one stand-alone customer who "hated our comments and kicked up such a fuss that we had to make numerous trips downtown." Similar stories exist where NSA analysts were criticized for comments customers didn't agree with. As a result of this conflict, people have reported that it is easier emotionally to "put in only the most innocuous of comments and that it's not worth the time and effort in responding to the comments to put them in."

### **(U//FOUO) Will we be measured by counting COMMENTS?**

(U//FOUO) Concern was voiced about a strict COMMENT-counting effort; the concern was that analysts, reporters, and editors would be checking off boxes without consideration of quality. A reference to Maureen Baginski's effort to have 85% of our reports in WTR (Write-to-Release) format and the unintended consequences that had on the quality and quantity of reports was brought up as a lesson learned for this effort.

### **(U) Why change until the system does?**

(U//FOUO) A strong opinion exists about training analysts more frequently with emphasis on critical thinking and analytics as well as the tools. Many people wrote me and indicated that P3s and evaluation criteria need to be adjusted.

### **(U//FOUO) Ongoing need to bring insights in addition to the facts.**

(U//FOUO) Our leaders require expertise and insights from the intelligence community every

day. [REDACTED] who is an NSA employee on the President's Daily Briefing team and who personally briefs the Secretary of Defense and Deputy Secretary of Defense, recently provided feedback on the SID *today* article "No Comment" and told me about the importance of including what an analyst thinks. She said, "If we [NSA] want to produce actionable intelligence, the interpretation and context are critical. When I prepare Secretary Rumsfeld's daily briefing, I opt not to use about a half-dozen single-source reports each day -- SIGINT included -- because though the facts are interesting, they lack any context and therefore raise more questions than they answer. Those are a half-dozen reports, multiplied by six days a week and 52 weeks a year, that might have had significant policy impact but didn't for want of analysis."

(U//FOUO) Are we destined to report just the facts? Are we mired in inertia from past directives that prevent us from change? Is it a function of time and resources? Are we not getting enough support in the community for diverse perspectives? Is training alone the answer? I am interested in your personal stories and suggestions for solutions.

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(U//FOUO) You may post your comments on the [SID today blog](#).

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