(U) Write Right: Loaded Words: Don't Politicize Reports

FROM: ▮▮▮▮▮▮
of the Reporting Board (S12R)
Run Date: 12/14/2006

(U//FOUO) "A known U.S. dissident" ... "a U.S. extremist" ... "a corrupt local official" ... what's wrong with this picture?

(U//FOUO) Today we tackle the problem of editorializing in SIGINT reports. Over the last several years, Policy Services and the Reporting Board have struggled to convey to zealous reporters who are being asked to do more assessment reporting and to include more analytic comment and validation statements that this does not mean inserting loaded adjectives into the text. For maximum understanding, we must use real-world examples that cannot be completely disguised, so we ask our readers to try not to take offense; be assured that these examples have generally been discussed with the production centers and appropriate wording has been worked out, always in a spirit of cooperation.

(C//SI) First of all, any such descriptions, *if* they need to be included, must be worded in such a way that it is quite clear whether they are a part of the SIGINT (e.g. if one of the communicants called someone "a corrupt law enforcement official"), or not. If, for instance, a report describes a political rivalry, a sentence such as "the minister expressed the view that his opponent was not only unpopular but insane" could be perfectly appropriate. If, however, the sentence were to read, "The minister, who is known for his corruption, expressed the view ..." this would be inappropriate. A source for an assertion of an official's corruption, such as bribe-taking, for instance, must be found and cited, possibly as a footnote ("See 3/OO/12345-06, 252359Z Dec 06" for information on the bribery") or "Collateral (SECRET) indicates that this minister is known to accept bribes," so that our customers will know what evidence is being advanced for the judgment. We hope this explanation disposes of the justification often advanced: "But that's what the traffic said!"

(U//FOUO) Furthermore, such a judgment on the part of an analyst, if it were included in a product report, would amount to a declaration by NSA that this was the case, and is a serious matter. There are two issues here: we must not put DIRNSA in the position of having made such a judgment. It is also inappropriate, to say the least, to describe a U.S. person in such a way. Do you know how hard it is even to have a U.S. person declared an agent of a foreign power? The U.S. Attorney General is the only one empowered to make that designation.

(S//SI//REL) Another argument we often hear is, "But we work in Crime & Narcotics so we know these guys are criminals" or "We work in Counterterrorism, so by definition all our targets are terrorists." This too is faulty reasoning. Our job is to report what is known or can be determined from the intelligence we gather. We reiterate Colin Powell's dictum " *Tell me what you know, tell me what you don't know, tell me what you think; always distinguish which is which.* "

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