

(U//FOUO) What Are We After with Our Third Party Relationships? -- And What Do They Want from Us, Generally Speaking?

FROM: the SIDtoday Editor and

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(U//FOUO) We've posted articles recently examining specific NSA/Third Party relationships,* but today we'd like to step back and look at the big picture. What is NSA's underlying motivation behind its dealings with Third Party nations, and what approach do we use? To find out, SIDtoday asked NAME REDACTED (pictured), from the SIGINT Operations Group in NSA's Foreign Affairs Directorate to answer a few questions. Here's what NAME REDACTED told us:

NAME
REDACTED

- ***1. (U) Does NSA establish 3rd Party ties to meet specific short-term needs, or do we take a more long-term approach, thinking in terms of developing relationships over the course of decades, even though they may not bear fruit for some time?***

(S//SI//REL) We establish foreign partnerships to satisfy U.S. intelligence requirements. For specific short-term needs, it may be sufficient to work through CIA Chiefs of Station (CoS) at those locations where we do not have SIGINT partnerships established. Formal relationships require considerable resources, so if we can meet our objectives -- particularly short-term ones -- working through CIA, that's okay. If, on the other hand, our SIGINT exchanges increase in volume and/or complexity, or if a direct partnership is necessary because of Indications and Warning (I&W) considerations (i.e., we need rapid, direct exchange of information), then we will establish a formal SIGINT relationship, after DNI approval.

(C//REL) Many of our relationships have, indeed, spanned several decades, allowing us to establish higher degrees of trust with and reliance on one another. This, in turn, has led to greater levels of cooperation, where, for instance, NSA might be willing to share advanced techniques with a proven and reliable partner, in return for that partner's willingness to do something politically risky. Trust requires years to build up but it can be lost in a very short period of time.

- ***2. (U) What are we after, in general? Is it our partners' accesses, or their expertise on a specific target... or is it impossible to generalize, because it varies on a case-by-case basis?***

(C//REL) Yes, yes and... yes! Our partners' geography and access to high-priority target communications are a huge plus, as is their expertise on specific targets. With rare exception, they know their regional 'hoods better than we do and they exponentially add to our foreign language capability.

- ***3. (U) Are our foreign intelligence relationships usually insulated from short-term political ups and downs, or not?***

(S//SI//REL) For a variety of reasons, our intelligence relationships are rarely disrupted by foreign political perturbations, international or domestic. First, we are helping our partners address critical intelligence shortfalls, just as they are assisting us. Second, in many of our foreign partners' capitals, few senior officials outside of their defense-intelligence apparatuses are witting to any SIGINT connection to the U.S./NSA.

(S//SI//REL) There are exceptions, both on the positive and negative sides. For instance, since the election of a pro-American president, one European partner has been much more open to providing information on their own capabilities and techniques, in hope of raising our intelligence collaboration to a higher level. Conversely, another of our partnerships has stalled, due largely to that country's regional objectives not being in synch with those of the U.S.

- ***4. (U) What do Third Parties typically want from us? What do they get out of the relationship?***

(S//SI//REL) Generally speaking, our Third Party partners want access to our technology, as well as our regional/global reach. In exchange for their providing unique accesses, regional analytical expertise, foreign language capabilities and/or I&W support, we provide them with technical solutions (e.g., hardware, software) and/or access to related technology. We must keep in mind that our partners are attempting to satisfy their own national intelligence requirements; with the exception of the assistance we provide during crises, we can only move our SIGINT relationships forward, when U.S. requirements intersect with theirs.

(C//REL) ...Thank you for the opportunity to describe some of our foreign partnering considerations. It's important for us to foot-stomp that FAD is an enabling organization. We do not conduct relationships in a vacuum; and our Country Desk Officers, front-end SIGINT Liaison Officers, Foreign Affairs Officers and staff are wholly committed to being in synch with -- or helping to synchronize -- SID, IAD, DIRNSA, DNI, the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence (USD(I)) and others in the Intelligence Community.