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AFSA-007/ef

23 July 1951

MEMORANDUM FOR AFSA-12

SUBJECT: USCIB 13/195, Comments on

1. I concur in the basic ideas and general principles of the subject document believing that if they can be successfully implemented they will not only improve the security of sensitive COMINT but also increase the operational usefulness of tactical COMINT.

2. The only features which afford grounds for concern are:

a. Practical difficulties and delays in deciding the category into which a given piece of COMINT material should be placed. This may frequently require minutes or hours of deliberation. It now often takes much time to decide whether a given document should be TOP SECRET or SECRET, for example, and with three categories of COMINT based upon decryptions or technical information related thereto (Categories A, B, and D), many occasions will arise when making the decision will require considerable thought or discussion. Also, in Category C, one of the exceptions, viz., exception (a), may cause loss of time in making a decision. Each person who will have this responsibility will tend to "play safe", thus making more frequent use of the higher classifications than is really necessary.

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b. Practical difficulties in making up the necessary number of rubber stamps and changing them from time to time. Category C and D designators would have to be changed rather frequently.

3. Before formally proposing the new scheme to LSIB, it seems to me that it would be advisable to make a short of "dry run" in AFSA to try it out. Such a test might disclose many unforeseen difficulties, or it might show them to be non-existent.

4. An alternative proposal is suggested below, based upon considerations of a rather fundamental nature and ones which are not usually thought of in this whole matter. They are as follows:

a. A few years ago there were only two or three categories of classified matter; now there are many, among which are the following:

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- (1) RESTRICTED
- (2) CONFIDENTIAL
- (3) SECRET
- (4) TOP SECRET
- (5) TOP SECRET - CONTROL
- (6) TOP SECRET - EYES ONLY
- (7) TOP SECRET - U.S. EYES ONLY
- (8) TOP SECRET - CODE WORD W *
- (9) TOP SECRET - " " X *
- (10) TOP SECRET - " " Y *
- (11) TOP SECRET - " " Z *
- (12) SECRET - " " A *
- (13) SECRET - " " B *
- (14) TOP SECRET - COSMIC
- (15) CONFIDENTIAL - NATO

etc. etc.

* These letters are substituted for the current code word designators.

Soon, no doubt, we shall have " TOP SECRET - US/UK EYES ONLY", " TOP SECRET - US/UK/CAN ONLY", etc. It is not difficult to imagine where this is going to end - possibly in the breakdown of the whole scheme.

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*Now
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b. In the eyes of the Law (U.S. Law, at least), there is one and only one classification: SECRET. Under the law a person who with intent to injure the U.S. disclosed RESTRICTED matter can be imprisoned for many years, just as many, in fact, as if he disclosed TOP SECRET matter.

c. When the basic objective in classifying information is considered, it is clear that it is intended primarily to establish limitations on the dissemination or distribution of that information; the additional objective, that of establishing different rules and different levels of safeguards for the physical protection and storage of information of varying degrees of sensitivity is really subsidiary to the primary objective, since these safeguards merely go a step further in insuring against a handling so loose that the information could be obtained by enemy agents. If, therefore, the subject of classification is looked at from this point of view, it is possible that the problems of classification may be greatly simplified, at least in respect to the number of different classifications.

5. a. Suppose there were but one classification: " SECRET", or "OFFICIAL SECRET", or "GOVERNMENT SECRET" - call it what you will. Suppose; further, that we establish what may be conceived of as "radii of dissemination" which will determine how many people will be brought into a given secret or category of secrets such as COMINT. We could do this by merely establishing specific distribution lists identified by numbers or letters or other symbols. For example, "Distribution 1" might include everybody in the Defense Establishment, military and civilian, who should be brought into the secret, a very large radius of dissemination. "Distribution 2" might include a smaller number of persons or offices; "Distribution 3", a still smaller number, and so on, until we reach "Distribution X", which might include but two or three persons.

b. This concept is, of course, directly related to the concept which has become basic in the matter of dissemination of COMINT information or material, viz., such information or material is imparted only on the basis of a "need-to-know".

c. In practice, all COMINT documents would, under this scheme, bear the same stamp, for example, "SECRET - BLANK" (the latter being a "code word material designator"). It would be followed by "Distribution 17" (for example, which might indicate a certain class or level of commands), or the distribution number might be indicated in the usual place on the document.

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d. The foregoing concept of differing radii of dissemination is embodied in a recent proposal on "Dissemination of Intelligence based on COMINT to foreign nationals serving in NATO or similar commands" (USCIB 14/141 of 11 July 1951). Extension of the scheme proposed in the paper referred to might not be too difficult and the possibility should be explored.

6. It is realized, of course, that a scheme such as that proposed herein would be so radical as to preclude its acceptance not only by LSIB but also by USCIB and the Department of Defense. But it is reiterated that unless some positive steps are soon taken in regard to the constantly increasing number of classifications the time will soon come when the present scheme will fall of its own weight. Already there are rumors of an impending demand for a classification higher than TOP SECRET.

/s/ William F. Friedman

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