
NSA Issues for Chapter 4

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- a. Review Board Guidelines. National Security Agency employee names, targeting, intercept, and transmission indicators, internal production indicators, and routing and dissemination information are generally protected unless the specific detail is important to an understanding of the assassination or events surrounding the assassination. Substitute language is provided consistently throughout the documents.
- b. Commentary. From the first days of the Review Board, NSA documents have been considered on a document by document basis with individual words and punctuation marks being negotiated between NSA and the Review Board for release or redaction. Review Board members visited NSA for a background briefing and the NSA provided justifications and substitute language for each requested redaction.

Yet, like those of the CIA and FBI the NSA documents contain a number of repetitive issues, such as employee names, targeting and transmission indicators, internal production indicators, routing indicators, and dissemination information. For the first three years of its existence, the Review Board viewed and discussed each individual NSA document. Over time, however, the Board reached consensus and established general guidelines to deal with specific repetitive NSA issues.

For the work of the Review Board, NSA documents can differ from those of the CIA and FBI in several important ways. First, due to the nature of NSA information, few NSA employee names appear in the documents. Nonetheless, names do appear in letters and occasionally in other documents.

The National Security Agency Act (P. L. 86-36) allows for the protection of the names of NSA employees, whether current or retired. In addition, NSA argued that the release of any names, other than those of publicly acknowledged senior officials, jeopardized the potential security of US cryptographic systems and those individuals. The Review Board considered the names of NSA officers on a document by document basis. Given the

nature of NSA information, the Review Board members agreed that none of the few names which appear in the documents, and for which NSA requested protection, was of high public interest or central to an understanding of the assassination story. These names are protected under section 6(1)(A) of the JFK Act.

Secondly, signals intelligence (SIGINT) is an inherently fragile commodity. The specific information revealed in raw intercept traffic or intercept reporting can provide a great deal of information to foreign entities on US Government targeting, intercept, and cryptographic capabilities which could be relevant to current SIGINT capabilities. To reveal to a foreign government or entity that the US Government was capable of targeting and reading some or all of their communications, even in 1963, could provide information to that government or entity as to whether NSA is likely to have the targeting, intercept, and cryptographic capabilities to read similar communications today. Often it is not the basic information contained in the intercept but rather the fact that the information was acquired by an intercept or the specific technical details of how and from where the intercept was acquired which require protection. Thus the specificity of such details as transmission times, transmission methods, geographic locations, and government buildings or military unit numbers may be protected under section 6(1)(B) and (C) where the Board has determined that such information is not important to an understanding of the events surrounding the assassination.

Third, intercept traffic by its very nature picks up a wide variety of information and a significant amount of non-relevant information. NSA summaries of intercept traffic usually examine a wide variety of intercepts on many different subjects worldwide. Thus, the Review Board protected blocks of information where the information had no relevance to an understanding of the Kennedy assassination story.
