



(U) InSIDer's View of History: SIGINT Appearing in the Press (repost)

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(U//FOUO) Note from SIGINT Communications: This article first appeared in May 2004. We asked Deborah Maklowski to describe a memorable incident from her career...

(S//SI) The one that comes to mind occurred in the mid-80's, when I was working Polish Military Trade & Aid, and President Reagan was trying hard to convince a reluctant Congress to fund the Contras in Nicaragua.

(S//SI) I'd been following a deal in the making between Cenzin, the Polish government entity that handled foreign military sales, and the pro-Soviet Sandinista government of Nicaragua for a (one) helicopter (the Sandinistas were NOT big spenders). Poland manufactured and sold a lot of helicopters, mostly for crop-dusting, and I didn't track those sales, but when I got the specs on this one and saw that it would be equipped with rocket launchers, I put out a report.

(S//SI) When I got back into the office the morning after the report was released, my branch chief asked me how much money I'd gotten for my Washington Post article: he then showed me my SIGINT report reproduced as an article in the Post. The only change to the text I'd written and released was the lack of classification. My guess is that the White House, which was looking for anything that would help make a case with Congress for support for the Contras, just unilaterally decided to release the SIGINT to the press, without asking and without sanitization, as yet one more piece of evidence of Soviet (well, sort of) support for the Sandinistas.

(S//SI) Twenty-some years later, I have to admit that my outrage at having a fragile SIGINT source put at risk so cavalierly was tempered by a guilty sense of pride that the Post had not seen fit to edit my text at all!

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