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Sensitive Compartmented Information

Sensitive compartmented information (SCI) is a type of United States classified information concerning or derived from sensitive intelligence sources, methods, or analytical processes. All SCI must be handled within formal access control systems established by the Director of National Intelligence.^[1] Although some sources refer to SCI control systems as special access programs, the intelligence community itself considers SCI and SAPs distinct kinds of controlled access programs.^[2]

SCI is not a classification. SCI clearance has sometimes been called "above Top Secret,"^[3] but information at any classification level may exist within an SCI control system. When "decompartmentalized" this information is treated the same as collateral information at the same classification level.

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Access

Eligibility for access to SCI is determined by a Single Scope Background Investigation (SSBI) or periodic reinvestigation.^[4] Because the same investigation is used to grant Top Secret security clearances, the two are often written together as TS/SCI. Eligibility alone does not confer access to any specific SCI material; it is simply a qualification. One must receive explicit permission to access an SCI control system or compartment. This process may include a polygraph or other approved investigative or adjudicative action.^[5]

Once it is determined a person should have access to an SCI compartment, they sign a nondisclosure agreement, are "read in" or indoctrinated, and the fact of this access is recorded in a local access register or in a computer database. Upon termination from a particular compartment, the employee again signs the nondisclosure agreement.

Control systems

SCI is divided into control systems, which are further subdivided into compartments and sub-compartments. These systems and compartments are usually identified by a classified codeword. Several such codewords have been declassified. The following SCI control systems, with their abbreviations and compartments, are known:

- Special Intelligence (SI)
- Special Intelligence (so in the CAPCO manual, but always SI in document markings) is the control system covering communications intelligence. Special Intelligence is a term for communications intercepts.^[6] The previous title for this control system was COMINT, but this was deprecated in 2011.^[7]

SI has several compartments, of which the following are known or declassified:



Example of intelligence on covert meetings held by the French President François Hollande. The intelligence was collected by the National Security Agency and classified as TOP SECRET//COMINT-GAMMA//ORCON/NOFORN, and released in form of a Global SIGINT Highlight on 22 May 2012.

- Very Restricted Knowledge (VRK)
- Exceptionally Controlled Information (ECI), which was used to group compartments for highly sensitive information, but was deprecated as of 2011.^[8]
- GAMMA (G), which has subcompartments identified by four alphanumeric characters.^[9]

Several now-retired codewords protected SI compartments based on their sensitivity, generally referred to as Top Secret Codeword (TSC) and Secret Codeword (SC).^[10] These codewords were:

- UMBRA for the most sensitive material
- SPOKE for less sensitive material
- MORAY for the least sensitive SI that required codeword protection.^[11]

These three codewords, the usage of which was terminated in 1999,^[12] were attached directly to the classification without reference to COMINT or SI, e.g. Top Secret UMBRA.



An SCI cover sheet from 1967.

STELLARWIND (STLW)

This codeword was revealed on June 27, 2013, when *The Guardian* published a draft report from the NSA Inspector General about the electronic surveillance program STELLARWIND. This program was started by President George W. Bush shortly after the 9/11 attacks. For information about this program, a new security compartment was created which was given STELLARWIND as its permanent cover term on October 31, 2001.^[13]

ENDSEAL (EL)

This control system was revealed in the 2013 Classification Manual. ENDSEAL information must always be classified as Special Intelligence (SI), so probably it is related to SIGINT or ELINT.^[14]

TALENT KEYHOLE (TK)

TK covers space-based IMINT (Imagery intelligence), SIGINT (Signals intelligence), and MASINT (Measurement and signature intelligence) collection platforms; related processing and analysis techniques; and research, design, and operation of these platforms (but see Reserve below).^[15] The original TALENT compartment was created in the mid-1950s for the U-2. In 1960, it was broadened to cover all national aerial reconnaissance (to later include SR-71 sourced imagery) and the KEYHOLE compartment was created for satellite intelligence.^[16] TALENT KEYHOLE is now a top-level control system; KEYHOLE is no longer a distinct compartment. Known compartments include RUFF (IMINT satellites), ZARF (ELINT satellites), and CHESS (U-2).^[17] The KEYHOLE series KH-1 through KH-4b were part of the new TALENT-KEYHOLE designation.^[18]

HUMINT Control System (HCS)

HCS is the HUMINT Control System. This system was simply designated "HUMINT" until confusion arose between collateral HUMINT and the control system. The current nomenclature was chosen to eliminate the ambiguity.^[19]

KLONDIKE (KDK)

KLONDIKE protects sensitive geospatial intelligence.^[20]

RESERVE (RSV)

RESERVE is the control system for National Reconnaissance Office compartments protecting new sources and methods during the research, development, and acquisition process.^[21]

BYEMAN (BYE)

BYEMAN is a retired control system covering certain overhead collection systems, including CORONA and OXCART.^[22] Most BYE content was transferred to TK. BYE Special Handling content was transferred to Reserve.

Markings

SCI control system markings are placed immediately after the classification level markings in a banner line or portion marking.^[23] Sometimes, especially on older documents, they are stamped. The following banner line and portion marking describe a top secret document containing information from the notional SI-GAMMA 1234 subcompartment, the notional SI-MANSION compartment, and the notional TALENT KEYHOLE-LANTERN compartment:

TOP SECRET//SI-GAMMA 1234-MANSION/TALENT KEYHOLE-LANTERN//NOFORN
(TS//SI-G 1234-M/TK-L//NF)

Older documents were marked with HANDLE VIA xxxx CONTROL CHANNELS (or "HVxCC"), HANDLE VIA xxxx CHANNELS ONLY (or "HVxCO"), or HANDLE VIA xxxx CHANNELS JOINTLY (or "HVxCJ"), but this requirement was rescinded in 2006.^[24] For example, COMINT documents were marked as HANDLE VIA COMINT CHANNELS ONLY. This marking led to the use of the caveat CCO (COMINT Channels Only) in portion markings,^[25] but CCO is also obsolete.^[26]

Notes

1. ICD 1, p. 22
2. DCID 3/29
3. Robert S. McNamara, quoted in Richelson, *The Intelligence Community*, p. 511
4. ICPG 704.1
5. ICD 1, p. 9
6. UKUSA COMINT Agreement, PDF p. 27. Note that common SIGINT terms were defined differently in this version of the UKUSA agreement; the modern definitions were codified by 1955.
7. Intelligence Community Classification and Control Markings Implementation Manual v4.2, p. 58
8. NRO Review and Redaction Guide, p. 140.
9. Intelligence Community Classification and Control Markings Implementation Manual v4.2, p. 60-63
10. In Camera Affidavit of Eugene F. Yeats (https://www.governmentattic.org/2docs/NSA_YeatesInCameraAffidavit_1980.pdf)
11. Richelson p. 512-514
12. "Implementation Guidance for Elimination of Codewords (<http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB24/nsa23.pdf>)" October 22, 1999
13. NSA inspector general report on email and internet data collection under Stellar Wind – full document (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/interactive/2013/jun/27/nsa-inspector-general-report-document-data-collection>) June 27, 2013. See page 12 for the assignment of the cover term.
14. Robert Sesek, *My First FOIA Request: ODNi CAPCO v6* (https://robert.sesek.com/2014/4/my_first_foia_request_odni_capco_v6.html), April 10, 2014
15. Intelligence Community Classification and Control Markings Implementation Manual v5.1, p. 65
16. Critique of the Codeword Compartment
17. Richelson, *The US Intelligence Community*, p. 514
18. <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB225/doc23.pdf> Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20161101044611/http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB225/doc23.pdf>) 2016-11-01 at the Wayback Machine.
19. Authorized Classification and Control Markings Register v1.2
20. Intelligence Community Classification and Control Markings Implementation Manual v4.2, p. 56
21. Intelligence Community Classification and Control Markings Implementation Manual v5.1, p. 54
22. National Reconnaissance Office Review and Redaction Guide, p. 7

23. Authorized Classification and Control Markings Register v1.2
24. ICPM 2006-700-8
25. See [this page](#) for an example.
26. Authorized Classification and Control Markings Register v1.2

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