Policies for the Handling of Security Classified Information in International Organizations

By: Marie Shockley, MASLIS
With Ineke Deserno (NATO), Eng Sengsavang (NATO), Shadrack Katuu (IAEA), and Julia Kastenhofer

ABSTRACT

What is security classified information and how do we, as archivists and records management professionals, deal with it? The policies and procedures organizations have, or do not have, regarding security classified information can cause major disruption in access to the information as well as transparency for the organization. My research has focused on developing resources to help staff of organizations that regularly handle security classified information to manage and handle classified information using best practices within a framework that best supports the maintenance and preservation of authentic, reliable, and usable records and especially in regard to digital records and the cloud environment. In analyzing the access and classified information policies of 15 international organizations my research team has identified several key areas in which the tensions between security and access are written into the policies. To aid organizations in the development or revision of their policies my research team has created a checklist for security classified information policies that brings the policies under an archival framework in addition to the pure security perspective that is common in such policies.

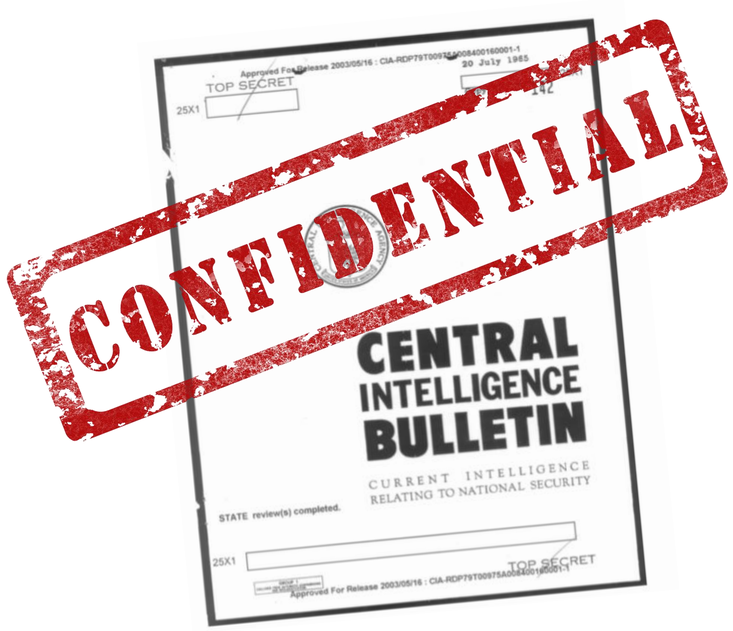
BACKGROUND

A review of literature focusing on the topic of "Security Classified Information" revealed many trends and gaps

- Focus on government context—in particular, the tension between a citizen's right to information and the State's need to protect

  - a big issue highlighted by this literature is weak definitions in policies for frequently used terms

- Most literature is written from security or legal perspectives
- The small amount of archival & records management literature tends to center around the declassification process



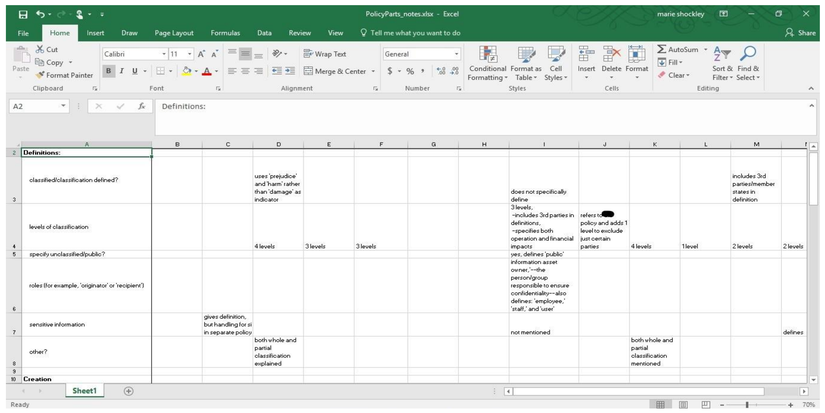
WHAT WE DID

- Contacted over 70 international organizations (IOs) to collect their policies for security classified information

  - Received nearly 30 policies from 15 organizations

  - Participating organizations covered a wide range of IOs in Europe and the Americas

- Once all the policies were collected we began to compare and contrast the policies
  - Were there similar sections? Definitions? Provisions?
  - If there were differences, why? (for example, organization context or the age of the policy?)
  - Were there provisions for digital records or cloud storage? Or were they written in such a way to account for changing technology without specifically mentioning different mediums, etc?
  - How did policies account for records management principles (like authenticity), if at all?

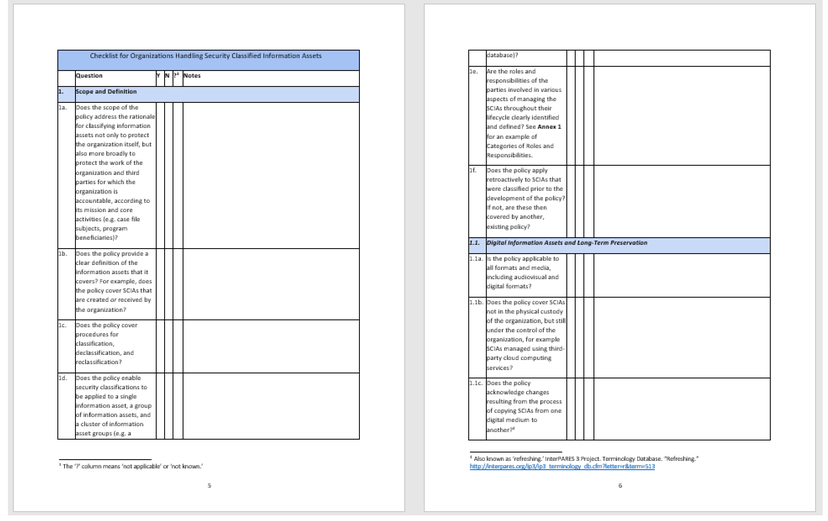


(Screenshot of table created for tracking comparisons, names of organizations have been hidden or blacked-out for their privacy.)

- Considering these policies, current standards, and the body of literature on Security Classified Information (SCI) we began to create a checklist for policy writing that would take into account records management needs and principles.
- Sent a draft to colleagues for comments and suggestions.
- Edited.
- Sent draft 2.0 to participating organizations for comments and suggestions. This included both organization archivists, records management , and security professionals
- Edited.
- Sent draft 3.0 to colleagues for suggestions.
- Edited.

RESULTS

Lit review and checklist to be published and made available through InterPARES Trust.



Checklist for Organizations Handling Security Classified Information Assets

	Question	Y	N	N*	Notes
1.	**Scope and Definition**				
1a.	Does the scope of the policy address the rationale for classifying information assets not only to protect the organization itself, but also more broadly to protect the work of the organization and third parties for which the organization is accountable, according to its mission and core activities (e.g. case file subjects, program beneficiaries)?				
1b.	Does the policy provide a clear definition of the information assets that it covers? For example, does the policy cover SCIAs that are created or received by the organization?				
1c.	Does the policy cover procedures for classification, declassification, and reclassification?				
1d.	Does the policy enable security classifications to be applied to a single information asset, a group of information assets, and a cluster of information asset groups (e.g. a database)?				
1e.	Are the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved in various aspects of managing the SCIAs throughout their lifecycle clearly identified and defined? See **Annex 1** for an example of Categories of Roles and Responsibilities.				
1f.	Does the policy apply retroactively to SCIAs that were classified prior to the development of the policy? If not, are these then covered by another, existing policy?				
2.	***Digital Information Assets and Long-Term Preservation***				
2.1a.	Is the policy applicable to all formats and media, including audiovisual and digital formats?				
2.1b.	Does the policy cover SCIAs not in the physical custody of the organization, but still under the control of the organization, for example SCIAs managed using third-party cloud computing services?				
2.1c.	Does the policy acknowledge changes resulting from the process of copying SCIAs from one digital medium to another?[4]				

[4] Also known as 'refreshing.' interPARES 3 Project. Terminology Database. "Refreshing." http://interpares.org/ip3/ip3_terminology_db.cfm?letter=v&term=513

(screen shot of draft 1.5)

Highlights:

- **Records management vs. Security Framework**
  - In addition to a security framework, are SCIAs (Security Classified Information Assets) placed within an information or records management framework, for example by contextualizing the SCIAs within a records lifecycle?
- **Digital records**
  - Is the policy applicable to all formats and media, including audiovisual and digital formats?
  - Does the policy acknowledge changes resulting from the process of copying, transforming, and/or transferring SCIAs?
- **Classification of systems vs. data**
  - Does the policy enable security classifications to be applied to a single information asset, a group of information assets, and a cluster of information asset groups (e.g. a database)?
- **Preservation of metadata**
  - Does the policy provide sufficient provisions for the preservation of descriptive and technical metadata, including metadata related to security classifications?
- **Reclassification and declassification**
  - Are the criteria, timeframe, and method for reclassification and declassification of SCIAs clearly indicated?

CONCLUSIONS

There's still a lot of room for more discussion and research in this area. While there has been a lot of research into government policy, there has been little published about confidential information in international organizations or even private organizations. Most standards and current literature focuses on the security and legal perspective, but fail to incorporate records management principles which would aid in the long-term preservation of authentic, reliable, and usable records. Policies which are created through a more rounded perspective, including security, legal, and archival/records management input will be less likely to cause disruption in flows of information creating a more transparent environment for international organizations, their member States, and society as a whole.