(U//FOUO) ConSIDer This: What Does It Mean to *Downgrade* COMINT?

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(C//SI) Downgrading is often confused with sanitization:

- Sanitization is carried out in order to make COMINT information releasable outside of COMINT channels (e.g., making it straight SECRET).
- Downgrading, by contrast, does not involve taking material out of COMINT channels -- the information stays either within or outside of COMINT channels, and that aspect of it does not change. The only change is to the classification level. So, for example, changing text from TS//SI to S//SI would be a downgrade, as would changing TOP SECRET information to SECRET. In order to downgrade COMINT, a plausible cover (i.e., collection from a less sensitive source) must exist.

(U//FOUO) The downgrading of U.S. COMINT is performed only by:

- an Original Classification Authority (OCA) at NSA, in coordination with the Information Security Policy office (DC322), or
- personnel tasked specifically with the formal review and declassification of cryptologic materials. (These are typically contractors working to comply with E.O. 12958, and does not include anyone in the SIGINT Directorate below the level of OCA.)

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