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# STUDIES IN INTELLIGENCE



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*A system for the overt collection  
of pictorial intelligence world-wide.*

## THE GRAPHICS COORDINATOR PROGRAM

Anthony Porcaro

Areas of low priority in terms of current intelligence interest can become extremely important with little advance warning, as the British found out at Dunkirk and later with respect to the all-too-familiar coast across the Channel,<sup>1</sup> and one of the first limitations to be placed on foreigners in a new "hot spot" is a restriction against photography. It is plain that the community's effort to keep ready against the possibility of surprise good basic intelligence on all areas, centered in the NIS program, needs to include a comprehensive and up-to-date collection of photography. Our military attachés abroad have primary responsibility for such collection with respect to military subjects, but for photographs of political, economic, or sociological interest the vehicle is the community's Graphics Coordinator Program. It encourages a continuing flow of pictorial information from low-priority areas, in particular from places where U.S. mission photographic activities would otherwise be limited or non-existent, as from minor posts in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America.

### *History of the Program*

The Program, rather new in its developed present form, has antecedents in many years of less systematic effort. As early as the summer of 1948, acting on the request of the CIA Graphics Register, the Department of State sent out a serial outlining for its foreign posts a program for the collection of photography primarily on political, geographic, social, and economic matter and listing types of subjects on which coverage was desired. A year later a follow-up serial was sent out, and as a device to encourage volunteer participation a limited amount of film was made available for officers interested in photographing the types of subjects specified.

<sup>1</sup> See chapter on topographical intelligence in James Leasor's *The Clock with Four Hands* (New York, 1959). The BBC's broadcast appeal for tourist photography brought in nine million snapshots.

In 1957, to stimulate further the interest of volunteers and guide their efforts, Graphics Register adopted a practice of briefing as many outgoing foreign service officers as possible. This did increase the number of pictures sent back, but the program still suffered the disadvantage of depending on voluntary, extra-curricular activity for which no one at the foreign post felt any particular responsibility. The Chief of Mission was often unaware of its existence.

Seeing this deficiency, State Department's intelligence chief suggested that the responsibility could be tied down by designating one officer to act as Graphics Coordinator at each post. If an amateur camera fan, actual or potential, were given this job and furnished camera and film, he would be likely to produce a good deal of photography himself as well as encourage others. This idea was explored with a number of Chiefs of Mission during a trip to Africa in 1958 and met with their approval. Circular instructions were therefore prepared, in collaboration with the Graphics Register, and sent to the field asking each post to name such a Coordinator, listing general requirements for photography, suggesting possible sources, outlining arrangements for providing equipment, and prescribing what to do with the product.

This instruction produced an immediate increase in the volume of photography reaching the Register, but it became evident that Coordinators should have in handy form some standard instructions on the use of the camera and more specific guidance for the collection effort. In March 1960, accordingly, a booklet entitled *Guide to Graphics Coordinators* was produced and copies sent to 260 posts abroad. The *Guide* has a large section on the technical aspects of photography, explains the rationale of the collection program, specifies the subjects on which coverage is needed, and lists sources from which the Coordinator might supplement his personal effort and that of other officers at the post—local publications, American travelers, and business firms for economic subjects. The Political Section of the *Foreign Affairs Manual* also now contains a section on the "Collection of Photographs" giving standing instructions and encouragement.

Today the Program has become an effective effort for the collection of ground photography world-wide. There are Coordinators in 191 foreign service posts with 219 cameras at their disposal. During fiscal year 1963 they were responsible

for the procurement of 42,000 photographs, more than 16,000 of which were suitable for acceptance into the photographic files of the Graphics Register. As an official activity of foreign posts, the Program is now one aspect under which these are subject to periodic review by Foreign Service inspectors, and the Graphics Register is asked to comment on the quality of the Coordinator at each post.

The Register, one of CIA's services "of common concern" to the community, directs the entire program, using the informal State Department Operations Memorandum (for which it has been delegated signing authority, subject to clearance through the State country desks). It issues collection requirements, furnishes supplies and equipment, when necessary provides funds for the purchase of photography, and receives, processes, and files the product.

#### *Requirements and Response*

Graphics Coordinators, like most collectors, work best under the guidance of a requirements list which contains specific targets. Such a list, prepared for every country where the Program is active, is sent to the posts with a reminder that whether or not to attempt photography of any item on the list is left to the discretion of the Chief of Mission. The exercise of local discretion is particularly necessary in places where restrictions have been put on the use of cameras.

A great deal of effort is put into the preparation of the requirements lists. An attempt is made to anticipate the needs of scheduled intelligence production, particularly the NIS series and a handbook program of the CIA Clandestine Services. Consideration must be given to the requirements of targeting groups, specific NPIC requirements for collateral material, the standing requirements of CIA offices, and deficiencies in the Register's general file. At the same time duplication of items in the requirements lists of military attachés or of requirements already levied on other collectors must be avoided.

The resulting list contains both general categories and specific items. It can be supplemented at any time by ad hoc requests to fill needs as they arise. Current requirements and additional guidance may be sent to a Coordinator after he has informed the Register of travel he has planned.

The response to requirements is generally good; recent examples can be cited from Lisbon and from Ecuador. A list of requirements prepared for Portugal reflected needs in the preparation of NIS sections relating to health and sanitation, fuels and power, and industrial development in that country. Taking this list, the Coordinator collected all the required photography not only on Portugal but on Portuguese Africa as well, the latter from embassy personnel who had recently travelled there. He also made excellent use of local publications.

The Coordinator in Ecuador, supplied with a list of airfields on which there was no photography, obtained good photographs of the majority of these and reported that the rest of them had been photographed by the air attaché, so that the pictures could be obtained through military channels. He also obtained from local AID personnel exclusive photographs in response to requirements on agriculture, terrain, and ethnic groups.

In these two examples, as in experience generally, the value of a list of specific photographic needs stands out. Without such a list the Graphics Coordinator tends either not to function or to produce photography which is duplicative or otherwise not worth incorporating into the Register's files.

#### *Coordination with Military Attachés*

In the second example above there was spontaneous coordination with a military attaché in obtaining photography. Photography of military activity, personnel, and installations is ordinarily the exclusive responsibility of the military attachés. Nevertheless the Graphics Coordinator does not ignore opportunities to photograph significant military items in the absence of the appropriate attaché. The attachés are often overloaded and appreciate any help they can get. It is only necessary, as the requirements instruction usually points out, to coordinate with respect to overlapping civilian-military interests.

In practice the military and civilian photo collection activities seldom duplicate but rather complement each other. Not infrequently, therefore, they may combine in a team effort, as when the Coordinator in Phnom Penh flew with the air attaché along the border with South Vietnam in order to photograph the sections on which he had requirements.

Non-military subjects which are yet militarily significant—like highways, bridges, and harbors—and therefore normally covered by attaché photography can be deemphasized by the Coordinator in favor of his economic and sociological requirements. But this does not mean that he should neglect targets of opportunity related to the military requirements.

*Individual Spectaculars*

Photo collection under this program, primarily a contribution to basic intelligence and production with long-range requirements, occasionally turns up items that have startling application to current intelligence problems. In the developing nations, in particular, the Coordinators have provided significant first-hand reporting on Bloc shipments and on new construction done with Bloc aid. The two following cases illustrate the use of such photography as collateral material in reaching important intelligence conclusions.

The Army attaché in Panama photographed covered deck cargo on two Soviet vessels that passed through the canal together. One of the two went to Cuba; the other, carrying cargo of identical configuration, went to Ghana. That en route for Cuba was believed to be a military shipment until a report with photography was received from the Coordinator in Ghana showing that the second ship had carried only a variety of agricultural machines. This pointed to a probability that the shipment to Cuba was also not military but agricultural.

The Coordinator at Khorramshahr, Iran, photographed for a period of years the deck cargo of Soviet ships which came up the Persian Gulf en route to Iraq: there was a requirement for information on the economic and military aid Iraq was receiving. The resulting "Khorramshahr collection" became a key matrix in developing the technique for identifying military cargo such as Soviet MIG aircraft and related items from the size and shape of crates or other packaging, a technique that came into its own at the time of the Cuban missile crisis.