Intelligence Analysis and the Bureau: The Evolution of Analysis and the Analyst Position in the FBI, 1908-2013

John Fox

Federal Bureau of Investigation

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jss

pp. 114-123

Recommended Citation

This Papers is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Access Journals at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Strategic Security by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.
Intelligence Analysis and the Bureau: The Evolution of Analysis and the Analyst Position in the FBI, 1908-2013

John Fox

Introduction

The topic of this paper is the history of analysis in the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). This might seem ironic to some. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the state of American intelligence analysis came under central focus and criticism. The FBI’s lack analytic culture and its handling and mishandling of intelligence before 9/11 came in for particular criticism. Some argued along the lines that the FBI had a law enforcement mentality, it was a bunch of cops, good at scouring a scene for evidence, putting together a prosecution case, and turning it over to prosecution. It was not, they continued, good at the intelligence game, the subtle world of collecting intelligence over a long time frame, not looking for the quick arrest, and then analyzing that information to inform policy makers. Against this, the FBI embarked on a significant change in its approach to the collection, analysis and application of intelligence. It was to become, according to Director Mueller, an “intelligence-driven, threat focused organization.”

There are, of course, elements of truth in the criticism of the Bureau, and yet it has made significant strides towards this vision illustrated by Director Mueller. An historical examination of the role of analysis and analysts in the FBI and the wider intelligence community will provide some useful lessons about the role of the FBI in the United States Intelligence Community (USIC) and allow us to consider the intertwining of the strengths and weaknesses of the Bureau, the IC, and even some broader issues about the nature of intelligence and its analysis.

From the beginning, the FBI had a role in matters related to the wider field of intelligence. It was begun as an experimental collection of thirty-four detectives in the summer of 1908. It had no name and its mission was simply defined: conduct investigations for the Attorney General. This entailed matters as diverse as the handful of federal criminal violations then on the books, including matters like the Neutrality Acts, which encroached on foreign intelligence matters, and prohibitions against alien anarchists – the William McKinley assassin Leon Czolgosz type, not the Han Solo type, i.e. domestic intelligence concerns.

With the onset of World War I and the rapid development of Army and Navy intelligence elements, we see a growing role for the FBI in homeland security matters, including counterintelligence. The Bureau’s domestic focus is not surprising, given its chief remit to investigate violations of U.S. law, continued through the end of the war and the terrorist attacks of 1919/1920, and the back-lash against Bureau actions to identify and ensure deportation of enemy aliens connected to the ideologies that fueled those attacks. During this period of growth, Congress authorized the Bureau to conduct investigations on behalf of the State Department, an interesting, intelligence related codicil that would not become significant until the 1930s.

---

Analysis at this time could be said to be strictly tactical nature. In the case of the Army, for example, it was related to compilation of maps, scouting the enemy, ferreting out enemy agents, and other practices aimed at battlefield victory. For the Bureau, it was developing cases to identify the guilty, the dangerous, and to see that they were dealt with through the criminal justice system. In this regard, a massive analysis was done by J. Edgar Hoover in order to argue for the deportation of Ludwig Martens, the first and non-official Soviet “ambassador” to the United States. Hoover’s brief for the court – he was an attorney by training – took extensive intelligence collected by Bureau agents and crafted an analysis aimed at victory on a battlefield before the bar.

Whereas much intelligence work receded into the background through the 1920s and the mid-1930s, as the political situation in Europe and Asia heated up, the Bureau and the Service elements began to work together against espionage threats. With regards to domestic intelligence matters, the FBI conducted extensive investigation to meet State Department, actually White House, via that codicil about investigations for State, requirements related to the role of domestic supporters of Hitler and Stalin. In 1939, the FBI, Army and Navy began to divide up responsibility for domestic security. In 1940, the FBI was assigned to collect and disseminate intelligence in the Western Hemisphere that was not already the responsibility of the Army or Navy. This led to the creation of the FBI’s Special Intelligence Service, and some of its earliest forays into true analysis.

“As the program progressed the supervisors at the Seat of Government were so assigned that information emanating from certain countries would always be handled by certain individuals who due to their familiarity with the affairs of those countries became expert in the conditions existing in the territory under their supervision.” Before 1944, these supervisors also compiled monographs in addition to regular supervisory work and during fiscal year 1945 a specific unit was created to do this. Monographs were disseminated to other agencies including Army, Navy, State, and Treasury, the White House, the Attorney General and Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. Titles included various country studies, “Clandestine Radio Stations Utilized by the German Espionage System,” “The Free French Movement in Latin America,” “Current Revolutionary Movements in South America,” “The History of Communism in Mexico” and “The Philippine Situation.”

Other positions within the Bureau were created of a simple, but analytic nature. The more capable file clerks were tasked with combing the FBI’s massive files to correlate information on any number of subjects of a domestic or foreign intelligence nature. Previously, such file review had been left to agents, but with the explosive growth of the Bureau’s responsibilities and resources, the age of the agent doing it all by himself was over, but the Bureau’s focus on the case, or a tactical level remained.

At the same time, intelligence analysis was evolving, and at a faster rate, within the wider IC, but limited by its inexperience and executive policy. The service cryptographic elements greatly

---

3 Ibid, 223.
expanded their Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) analysis capabilities to deal with Axis codes. Donovan’s OSS had an inkling that it would be a central controller of U.S. intelligence, closer in intent to the system then in place in Britain, but it was late to the table and powerful actors had already well developed pieces in play. Still, the newest member of the U.S. intelligence mosaic justifiably prided itself on its large and organized cadre of more than 2000 analysts, many historically trained. There was much talent, enthusiasm, and dedication, but ad hoc organization and no tradition or practices to build on given the embryonic state of U.S. intelligence, and limited ability to avail itself of the wider community’s products limited its effect. As Christopher Andrew noted, this was a truism for American analysis as a whole. The voluminous products of multiple agencies competed for White House attention with the products of other agencies as well. This was exacerbated, of course, by President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s (FDR) penchant for skimming direct reports from multiple sources, some professional collectors, others well-heeled amateurs, meant that any impact was likely negligible as Donovan had no direct path to the president. And yet, despite the size, as Steve Marrin, quoting Agrell has noted “the early period of intelligence during World War II “was followed by the ”guilds,” the time of the skilled craftsmen in well-fenced, closed organizations.” England, by way of counterexample, had a much more limited focus, i.e. survival, and so brought a more centralized approach to analysis to bear, especially on its XX operations, which integrated SIGINT, Human Intelligence (HUMINT) and denial and deception operations in a largely seamless web.

With the end of the war, intelligence neophyte Harry Truman had a fire sale on Office of Strategic Services (OSS) components, most of which had been condemned as wasteful and redundant in a study by Colonel Richard Park, FDR’s military aid in his final months. Park did value the Research and Analysis Branch, noting that it had done an “outstanding job” but even that didn’t save the section as Truman sent most of it back to the schools they had come from, with some few ending up at State, the National War College in the fortuitous case of Sherman Kent, and other corners around the government. Even the creation of a “central” intelligence agency, under the National Security Act of 1947, federal intelligence analysis did not develop beyond what it had been during the war.

That did not mean that it didn’t have successes. The FBI’s tactical work on the Soviet problem in light of the 1945 Gouzenko and Bentley defections, and the post-war collaboration between FBI and Army Signals Agency (later National Security Agency - NSA), now known as Venona led to significant strides against Soviet intelligence penetration of the U.S. Given the need to maintain operational security for that cryptographic break-through, the Bureau was able to parlay the analysis and exploitation of Venona into only a handful of convictions – i.e. the Rosenbergs, Morton Sobell, and the Greenglasses. In those, the public trials were based on witness testimony by David and Ruth Greenglass, not the intelligence behind their captures, which wound a complicated path from SIGINT, through the British arrest of Klaus Fuchs, to U.S. chemist/spy Harry Gold, to Greenglass, and finally to the ring leader, Julius.

The idea of an agency that could compile all source intelligence analyses remained. It was highlighted not one year after the Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA) creation in Allen Dulles’s

---

5 Ibid, 156.
1948 Report on the new agency. Dulles –looking both to the actions of the CIA and the wider IC -- argued that “key to an effective intelligence system was for CIA to perform its statutory coordinating role in operations and analysis,” but, according to the report, the CIA at that point was not paying enough attention to such coordination.\(^6\) One key recommendation to get it moving along this line was the creation of an all-source analysis cadre to produce national intelligence estimates. In 1950, the Agency moved to do this, creating an Office of National Estimates (ONE), to compile strategic analyses for the President and other Executive officials. This ONE brought Sherman Kent back to the IC under the old OSS R & E boss, William Langer.\(^7\) Kent, who had recently written an influential apology for analysis took over the ONE within two years and became a most influential proponent of professional analysis. For the next fifteen years, Kent developed the CIA’s analytic capability.

While Kent developed a theory and praxis for analysis in the Agency, the FBI continued to practice analysis as it had, aiming its efforts primarily at operational matters. This occurred on both foreign and domestic intelligence fronts. On the foreign intelligence front, the Bureau worked well (much of the time) with NSA and CIA and foreign agencies like the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and Military Intelligence Section 5 (MI-5) to share intelligence and incorporate it into the Bureau’s awareness of Soviet and East Bloc threats. This allowed the Bureau to go more proactively against the Soviet threat and its domestic supports. On the latter part, though, this led to operations like COINTELPRO (Counter Intelligence Program), which would be roundly condemned when it was revealed in the 1970s. These strides, though, did not push Bureau analysis beyond the correlative and descriptive modes, i.e. tactical focus that it had developed during WWII.

One particular intelligence success, though, suggests that the Bureau did push its analysis further, even though it did not share the drive of Kent to professionalize it. I am referring here to the Bureau’s running of its Operation SOLO informants, Jack and Morris Childs. High ranking CPUSA members who had fallen in party circles, the Childs brothers rose again to the Communist Party’s (CP) highest ranks, but as recruits for the FBI. Morris especially, between 1958 and 1980, would travel to Soviet and East Bloc nations as well as China and Cuba as the CPUSA’s representative, taking with him requirements from the Bureau and other agencies, and returning with a wealth of intelligence on otherwise hard to access targets.

Upon Morris’s return, the handful of FBI agents involved in running Morris and Jack would record extensive reports of their trips and other actions. The Bureau would then produce memos on various subjects about which Morris reported and disseminate them, on an eyes only basis, to the Agency, State Department and White House primarily Morris’s reporting was invaluable, supplying Kremlin leadership reactions to President John F. Kennedy’s (JFK) assassination within days of the event, first reactions from high Soviet and Chinese leaders, including Mao and Khrushchev on Sino-Soviet relations, detailed notes on CP relations across the world, etc. Jack,


the other half of SOLO, was the CPUSA money man, allowing the FBI to track every dollar that came into CPUSA hands from international sources, the bulk of the party’s income.

This reporting was welcome around the IC. On December 8, 1959, one agent reported that on being briefed about SOLO’s recent trip to China, “Allen Dulles referred to the information [on SOLO meetings in Peking] as being ‘terrific.’ He was extremely interested in the information furnished concerning the Japanese Communist Party and he has found that the comments of the Red Chinese officials are being most helpful in analyzing the current Soviet ‘peaceful coexistence line.’” Of course an earlier Hoover marginalia noted that he didn’t want Bureau officials telling Dulles who their source was no matter how much he “whined” about it; within a few years of reporting, though, the Agency clearly knew who SOLO was, but whether it was first by deduction or by Bureau sharing, is not clear.

SOLO reporting did become part of USIC analysis. With regards to the Sino-Soviet split, one of the most significant matters on which Morris first reported the head of the FBI’s Intelligence Division noted that the

“CIA furnished [the Bureau with] a 100 page document analyzing ‘The Sino Soviet Dispute and Its Significance.’ This was prepared at the request of the White House...Inasmuch as the document contained a great deal of the information furnished by our informant 5824-S as a result of his trip to Moscow, CIA requested our authority to disseminate as indicated.”

He continued that

“We advised CIA on the night of April 6th that we would not object to the dissemination of this study providing the recipients were informed that much of the material was obtained by the FBI from highly delicate sources and, therefore, it must be afforded the utmost security; that the study not be disseminated outside the United States and hence no copy should go to the Ambassador in Moscow.”

Nor did the FBI leave strategic analysis of SOLO’s reporting to other agencies. The SOLO team, agents and informants, also produced significant analytic products on various subjects. These were usually a collaborative effort between agents and informants, especially Morris, as his insight into the personalities, motivations, and ideology of the principal targets was unparalleled. Let’s take another example of reporting on Sino-Soviet relations as an example. For example, a December 31, 1963 report from Chicago told headquarters that they had produced a ‘History and Development of the Sino-Soviet Rift’ and on Sino-Soviet relations generally during the period of 1958 to December 1963. This paper was the joint effort of CG-5824-S* [Morris] and Supervisor Carl N. Freyman. Other Bureau entities also made use of the Solo reporting for analytic products. In 1965, for instance, the Research Satellite Section prepared a comprehensive study concerning foreign funds channeled by communist countries into the Communist Party, U.S.A., for use within the Domestic Intelligence Division,” which presented “an over-all picture... of the Party’s reserve program, explains the Bureau’s method of considering the Party’s reserve program as two separate programs (Solo and Reserve), reveals the changing use being made of Solo funds by the Party, and discusses Gus Hall’s aloofness
from the Party’s financial transactions… [and shows] that the Party receives other funds from abroad, not considered a part of the Solo program, which indirectly assist the Party and supplement its receipts through the Solo operation.”

Meanwhile, the FBI also created a unit within its Crime Records Division, which combined criminal identification services, crime statistics and public affairs, to produce research monographs. The project was called Central Research Monographs and produced extensive analyses of Communist Party ideological statements designed to track the party’s changing policies and better inform agents working to recruit party members. Studies of groups like the Ku Klux Klan, the LCN, the Black Panthers and others were similarly aimed at ensuring up-to-date knowledge on groups of criminal and security concern. Other monographs analyzed topics from FCI matters, through domestic security, to criminal activity. Thus we see monographs on Soviet tradecraft, the potential for racial unrest in American cities, and patterns of major jewel theft. Depending on potential audience, these were disseminated throughout the IC, to the White House, or to other law enforcement agencies.

A third significant area of Bureau analysis should be noted and this gets to the heart of FBI Counter Intelligence (CI) responsibilities. In the 1960s, as you know, there was a major debate over the bona fides of Soviet defectors between elements of the USIC, especially the FBI and CIA. At the center of the debate were Yuri Nosenko and Anatolyi Golitsyn. Though the actual content of this analysis, in large part, has yet to be released, it is clear that the FBI provided significant input into the debate both as collector and analyst. Clearly, for the time, the Bureau’s analysis, though not as voluminous as the Agency’s, was strong.

What it was not, though, was estimative and methodological. Perhaps the most significant aspect to Sherman Kent’s model for analysis was his adaptation of an estimative intelligence process was strongly shaped by his prewar academic experience, and under his tutelage the Board of National Estimates seemed to have taken on the atmosphere of a faculty common room. The other key difference in Kent’s push to evolve analysis was his focus on methodology. As Don Steury noted, Kent’s methodological writings in Studies in Intelligence reflected an essentially empirical framework that he applied to analysis. The Bureau’s did not, nor did it adapt such a model in the 1960s as the Agency had. This reliance on descriptive, narrative analysis continued into the 1970s and 1980s as the Bureau produced analyses of the thousands of bombings and arsons, urban unrest, and many other matters.

Through the end of the Cold War, the FBI’s analysis process remained static. It had excellent tactical analysis, provided important pieces of intelligence on one matter or another arising from its work to other members of the community, and it moved towards the use of computer databases to collect and collate information on intelligence and criminal enterprise threats. And yet, the Bureau does not appear to have considered the adequacy of its analysis or take it in a more strategic direction with regard to either criminal or FI/FCI matters.

---

Organizationally, the Bureau made an effort to increase the maturity of its intelligence process. Such intent, though, was balked by a number of factors.\textsuperscript{9} In the wake of the Cold War, resources were significantly realigned from CI and counterterrorism (CT) to violent street crime, a clear national concern at the start of the 1990s. Furthermore, FBI computer systems were dated and stove-piped and would be a recurring concern for many years. By the late 1990s, the FBI sought to address its growing need for analysis across the Bureau. Its 1998 Strategic Plan noted a need to substantially enhance FBI “collection, analysis, and dissemination of intelligence.” The 9/11 Staff further found that “an internal review of the FBI’s intelligence analysis function at this time found that 66 percent of the Bureau’s analysts were not qualified to perform analytical duties. The review made recommendations for improvements. It appears that these recommendations were either not implemented or not enforced.” They noted that “FBI officials told us that it did not receive sufficient resources, and there was ongoing resistance to its creation from the senior managers in the FBI’s operational divisions. Those managers feared losing control. They feared losing resources. They feared they would be unable to get the assistance they wanted from the new division’s analysts.”\textsuperscript{10}

Meanwhile, the CIA was facing its own issues with its analytic program. Elements of Kent’s original goal of professionalizing analysis had continued to develop at the Agency as the Bureau’s analysis fell further behind, but it wasn’t unalloyed advancement. William Nolte noted that it was in the late 1990s that “the CIA’s intelligence directorate [began] to offer an extensive (and in pre-9/11 budgets, expensive) program of analytic training interspersed with on-the-job analytic assignments.”\textsuperscript{11}

In a subsequent 1999 reorganization, it created an “Investigative Services Division [ISD],” to consolidate its international operations and oversee major crisis management according to Cable News Network’s (CNN) Pierre Thomas. This was in the wake of the attacks on U.S. embassies in Africa, but before the bombing of the U.S.S. Cole in Yemen. Thomas also noted that the division was intended “to improve the FBI’s ability to analyze volumes of information coming from field offices in the United States and operations around the world.”\textsuperscript{12}

Along with the new ISD, a Counterrorism Division was created. Assistant Director Dale Watson proposed that it work according to a new strategy he called MAXCAP or Maximum Capacity. His goal was that the Bureau reach its “maximum feasible capacity” in counterterrorism by 2005 through a strategy focused on “intelligence gathering, valid and straightforward reporting and tracking mechanisms, effective interagency liaison and cooperation, and accountable program management.” Across the Bureau, the lack of analysis resources and expertise meant that such a strategy could not work without significant change. The 9/11 staff learned that the FBI field offices “did not have the analysts, linguists, or technically trained experts to carry out the strategy.” Watson’s vision was balked due to lack of resources, skills, and will, and the problem further illustrated that “The FBI had little

\textsuperscript{9} 9/11 Commission, Staff Statement No. 9, Law Enforcement, Counterterrorism, and Intelligence Collection in the United States Prior to 9/11, 3-4.
\textsuperscript{10} 9/11 Commission, Staff Statement No. 9, 5-6.
understanding of, or appreciation for, the role of strategic analysis in driving investigations or allocating resources.”

What strategic analysis the Bureau did conduct within the ISD; tactical analysis was assigned to operational squads both at headquarters (HQ) and in the field. These tactical analysts, given the Bureau’s history, were known and valued. The 9/11 staff found that Bureau “Agents viewed tactical analysts as performing duties that advanced their cases. They failed to see the value of strategic analysis, finding it too academic and therefore irrelevant.” Furthermore, they concluded that the “creation of the ill-fated Investigative Services Division may have worsened this attitude by distancing strategic analysts from agents in the operational divisions.”

The catalysis of 9/11, not surprisingly, changed this. Although the opening months following the attacks were characterized by the Bureau’s investigative/tactical work at its best, the soul searching across the government in its wake suggested the significant weaknesses to the Bureau’s approach. The problems of intelligence sharing and a lack of strategic analysis, not only in CT, but across investigative programs were highlighted. This was first noted in a report arising from the earlier issue of FBI traitor Robert Hanssen. William Webster, who had been asked to review FBI security in wake of Hanssen’s arrest, reported in March, 2002, that the Bureau must perform the analysis necessary to develop a comprehensive, prioritized plan to address security shortcomings. The framework for this analysis is straightforward. The FBI must define the information security environment it wants to create by identifying information policies, specific threats, and secure usage assumptions. The Bureau must assess threats that existing security countermeasures do not counter and information security policies that are not being enforced. The FBI can then select programs, tools, and technologies to sustain its security environment.13

Later that year, the Department of Justice (DOJ) Inspector General’s reported on the Bureau’s CT risk assessment and resource management, released in October 2002. The need for improved analysis was clear and the report highlighted the FBI’s need to integrate CIA experience into the FBI analysis process.14 In response, the FBI created an Office of Intelligence in April 2003 to oversee policy and production of analysis across the Bureau. This later became a Division of Intelligence. Analysis expertise from the Agency was borrowed and recruited to stand the office up, and the Bureau pressed Congress for more resources to hire and train analysts.

That same year, the Bureau also established “Field Intelligence Groups” or FIGS to serve as a linchpin in the FBI’s plan to integrate law enforcement and intelligence operations in the field. These analysis teams were instituted “to create an atmosphere and structure whereby the discipline of intelligence will infuse all operations conducted by special agents. Second, the Bureau, through the FIG, says it wants to elevate the importance of analysts within an FBI law enforcement culture that has long celebrated the role of the special agent and had less regard for

---

analysts. The Bureau also worked to develop intelligence career paths for agents and professional staff. Such concentration, on the agent side of the equation, was new.

Attorney General in 2004 ordered responses to several commission recommendations including the creation of “specialized and integrated national security workforce should be established at the FBI, consisting of agents, analysts, linguists and surveillance specialists” In 2005, the Bureau created a Directorate of Intelligence, bringing together the Intelligence, CT, CI, and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) functions of the Bureau; criminal intelligence, too, fell under the Division of Intelligence, but was not an equal focus. WMD Commission argued that these were insufficient as the a lack of authority for the Directorate’s management “prevents the FBI from vertically integrating foreign intelligence collection, analysis and operations Cummings noted that the reforms were taken in two ways, one saw a continued separation between analysis and collection at the FBI, the other – “optimists” see a synergy between intelligence and law enforcement.

Reform continued as the FBI hired more analysts, tried to stand up a more rigorous training program, and instituted policy standards regarding the analyst position and their production. In 2007, the Bureau instituted what it called a Strategic Execution Team, to build on and accelerate efforts to enhance the FBI’s intelligence capabilities, finished rolling out a standardized field intelligence structure to all FBI field offices. In his testimony to the House Judiciary committee in April 2008, Director Mueller described how the SET was to improve the FBI intelligence program. It was to ensure that the Bureau’s FIGS, some of which had worked well, others which had failed, would include a centralized strategic coordinating component. There would be a Chief Reports Officer who responsible for field office intelligence production. This production was to be “timely, of high quality, and relevant to the requirements of our customers. It will include a Domain Manager who will work with investigative squads across all programs to construct a comprehensive operational picture of the field office territory, including its critical infrastructure, threats, and vulnerabilities. This component also will include personnel who will create a consolidated, prioritized list of the intelligence requirements the office must address, and produce collection plans and strategies.”

More recently, the Director has noted that:

“Under the FBI’s new paradigm, intelligence enables a broader picture of the threat. Intelligence is not collected simply to further a particular case. This shift required the integration of intelligence and law enforcement capabilities. Intelligence is analyzed and disseminated to better understand the threat, to identify intelligence gaps, and to develop new collection requirements, which drive additional action in the field, leading to either additional collection or disruption.”

16 Cumming, “Intelligence Reform Implementation at the Federal Bureau of Investigation,” 5-6.
19 Mueller, “Statement Before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.”
Such changes suggest a movement towards a change in Bureau culture, change which can be seen in rising prominence of the analyst as a third employee division in the Bureau. For the Bureau’s first 100 years, employees could be seen as divided between agents and support; today analysts appear to be developing as a third category, but whether this will hold or not is to be seen. The production and dissemination of intelligence has also increased, but it is to be seen how effective this will be in enabling the Bureau and its colleagues in intelligence and law enforcement to fulfill their missions, both divergent and overlapping ones. Finally, it is to be seen if this embrace of a strategic side to intelligence analysis will hold too. Given that the Bureau, in the past, has successfully wielded analysis in its past in matters like Operation SOLO, it is clear that those who suggest an irresolvable bifurcation between intelligence and law enforcement operations are premature in suggesting that such changes cannot work, on the other hand, it is also clear from the Bureau failed efforts prior to 9/11 to reform its analysis, that such changes may face clear hurdles in the years to come as they are institutionalized.