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**MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD**

Event: **Alina Bloom, Supervisory Special Agent, Washington Field Office, FBI**

Type of Event: Interview

Date: August 4, 2003

Special Access Issues: None

Prepared by: Peter Rundlet

Team number: 6

Location: FBI, Washington Field Office

Participants Non-Commission: Jonathan Sils, Assistant General Counsel, FBI

Participants – Commission: Michael Jacobson and Peter Rundlet

**Background.** Alina Bloom graduated from Rutgers University and came to the FBI as an Agent, when she was 25 years old, in February 1983. Since then, she has worked in almost every programmatic area except White Collar Crime. She has worked in the Miami Field Office several times, San Juan, Mexico City (ALAT), Paris (ALAT), Headquarters (HQ) – Middle East Unit (from August 2000 – April 2002), and she has been at the Washington Field Office (WFO) since April, 2002. She is fluent in Spanish and can speak French at a “high level.” Bloom said that she was liking the field experience and coveted the WFO in particular. She was selected to be the Supervisory Special Agent (SSA) in charge of the Language Specialist Program in part because of her language background. When she arrived to the position, her predecessor was already gone and she knows almost nothing about him.

**The Language Program.** The language program at the WFO has about 111 linguists all together, representing 28 languages and even more dialects. The squad includes 4 Supervisory Language Specialists (SLS) that have three or four language boards assigned to each. All 4 SLSs report to Bloom and they are responsible for the day to day supervision of the language specialists (LS). With respect to the “hot languages,” there are 27 Arabic speakers on the Arabic board, of whom are 13 full-time employees and 14 contract employees. There are 8 Hindi Punjabi speakers (5 FT/3 contract), one Pashto speaker (contract employee); 10 Farsi speakers (5 FT/5 contract); and 4 Hebrew speakers (3 or 4 of whom are full time employees – she wasn’t sure).

Bloom indicated that the counterterrorism (CT) work continues to increase and that they need many more linguists, particularly Arabic speakers. She indicated that it

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hard to find more qualified speakers that can get the necessary security clearances, and that they lose many individuals during the clearance process. CT is the priority – and having the priority makes it easier to determine how to assign the work. Also, even within the CT arena, certain cases are assigned higher priority (e.g., all CT FISAs – for which a report is produced for each one). There is very little backlog in the priority areas. In other areas, such as for criminal cases, they are less caught up. Some foreign counterintelligence (FCI) work is shipped to other offices for translation.

The Language Program is really run out of HQ. John Tolarski (sp?) is the point person from HQ for the program; he oversees all of the LS hiring.

**Contract employees.** Bloom said that the contract employees receive a higher salary per hour, but they receive no benefits. They are all very busy, frequently logging more than 40 hours a week. The contractors get the same security clearances – all top secret, and face the same language testing requirements. Bloom said that there was a broader range of backgrounds now and that some of the LSs are not at the highest levels. Bloom indicated that she has tried to classify each linguist by skill level and to categorize their expertise as a means for exercising some quality control. Some LSs are only able to monitor conversations. When asked why so many of the LSs were contractors, Bloom indicated that she is not involved in the hiring decisions, but that her understanding is that the WFO didn't have the authority to hire full-time employees. She said that their contractor status has nothing to do with their skills. When asked how she exercises quality control over the lone Pashto speaker, she indicated that HQ handles this.

**Security Clearances.** Many, but not all of the LSs possess SCI clearances; LSs are read in and out of compartments, as needed. Bloom indicated that the security controls are being reviewed. In general, the FBI is being more careful about clearances than they were in the past.

**How work has changed.** The work of the squad has changed over time so that it is now more priority-based and therefore more efficient. Bloom said she has to closely review the assignments and make choices. Also, the linguists have to give feedback on the intercepts to help determine how well they are working.

**Supervision.** Bloom indicated that she was not very familiar with her predecessor (and clearly did not want to directly criticize him), but she said, "People seem to be happy about the level of attention I've given them. It's a large squad. I've reached out more than my predecessor did." When she started, an inspection was underway. Morale was very low. Bloom tried to make it a priority to address this. She said that there were no findings about the quality of the LS work product – that most were/are at an expert level. The LSs tend to be well-educated and are paid primarily at the GS-12 level.

When asked how much involvement she has with the LSs day to day, she said that she has regular squad meetings to remind people that she's accessible. These are huge meetings in the conference room. She said she has meetings more frequently with the

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“hot language” boards. She tries to give them training on how to handle threat information. Bloom has tried to obtain Analytic training from the CIA for her Linguists by having a CIA trainer come in. She has also invited Squad Agents to come down to talk about their cases and she’s arranged for some presentations on their CI program.

**Process for handling threat information.** During regular work hours, threat information is to be referred to both the case Agent involved and the Supervisor. After hours, the LS is supposed to contact CT Watch at HQ (which is the 24 hour operations center).

**Coordination/information sharing within the FBI.** Most seasoned Agents know what the language specialists do. Bloom tries to make sure that Supervisors know to have their Agents work with the Linguists. If the Agents haven’t been coming down to meet with the LSs, then she will go talk to their supervisors. She also addresses the newer Agents to make sure they interact. Bloom said that she tells the LSs that the Agent has the final authority, but that the LSs have input and should share it. Bloom indicated that there is a purpose to keeping things compartmentalized but that Agents should give LS enough information to find what they need. When asked if the Agents actually understand this, Bloom was very hesitant and said “generally . . . yes. When they don’t I talk to them.” (Her answer left the clear impression that this is still an issue.)

Bloom said that she requests that the analysts meet with the linguists once a month. She said that it sometimes happens that often, sometimes less. She keeps her own “black list” of analysts who don’t meet with the linguists.

[See discussion below regarding HQ role, too.] Bloom indicated that the linguists sometimes are aware of the need for other squads to know about a particular tech cut. When asked what intelligence products she sees, Bloom indicated that she sees the CT and CI intelligence that is disseminated to SSA on a regular basis. She will then share that information with those who need to see it. Bloom does not get operational cables, and she feels she has no need to see them. Bloom indicated that the ASAC might flag information for her – but that she does not get CIA products directly. She does get “intelligence alerts” put out by the Analytical Unit at HQ. When she gets particular threat information (e.g., regarding scuba divers or vessels) she disseminates the information to her linguists, because the information is unclassified and they need to know it.

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**FISAs.** When asked how much input the LSs have on FISA targets and whether to renew a particular FISA, Bloom responded that the product (or “take”) itself usually determines whether they should continue or not. When asked whether ASAC Pat Cook would seek her ideas about whom to target, Bloom responded that she gives him a list of all CT FISAs being worked at a given time and that he has to sign off on the target list.

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**Breakdown of FISAs v. Title IIIs.** Bloom said that they worked very few Title IIIs and that they were primarily a FISA operation. She said that Title IIIs are worked in a separate room. She said that the Department of Justice (DOJ) wants agents to start

using tools "on both sides of the house." She said that CT cases are worked primarily as Form 199 cases and the Form 265 cases were from a criminal angle. She said that we are starting to see Title IIIs on the counter-intelligence side (she mentioned that there were two in the past 6 months). She said 199s resulted in FISAs (which she referred to as "behind the scene").

**LS Products: Dissemination and Storage/Archiving(Zyindex).** LS products ("tech cuts") got to the Agent whose case is involved, and copies are sent to wherever the case Agent instructs. If threat information is involved, then a copy goes to the SLS and to Bloom. Bloom indicated that they are currently working on the computer to create an archiving process in order to create a database of prior tech cuts. They are working on a pilot project with technology to allow tech cuts to be integrated into the system. Bloom said there was also some dissemination of tech cuts to other squads. [This all sounded very informal, but Bloom said that] A Supervisor will take all tech cuts on certain subjects at the end of the month – that there is some sort of "electronic dump" into the ZyIndex (sp?), which is the archive of tech cuts. Bloom indicated that individuals only have access to the ZyIndex per the FISA requirements (*i.e.*, one has access to that portion of the Zyindex that you work – due to the legal minimization requirements, so that if you work Russians, you see the Russian stuff). Zyindex is a searchable database. Bloom was unsure whether analysts have access to the system. The LSs have access to Zyindex internally and they do search the system to try to develop information. So the more senior LSs serve an analytical function.

When asked whether the LSs ever produce intelligence products, Bloom said that she would like to groom and train them to do this over time. She said that the FBI needs to give them more training, especially since many of the LSs would be capable of producing useful products.

Bloom indicated that HQ is trying to standardize the process of writing tech cuts so that they are more uniform. Bloom said there was still subjectivity in what to write down. HQ is trying to develop a manual for tech cuts to standardize them. All tech cuts are classified at the Secret level.

**Access to databases/technology.** Bloom said that some of the LSs have access to ACS. Bloom indicated that she doesn't push for them to get involved with ACS because it takes the LSs away from their primary function – translation. "It is more effective to have a native English speaker do the ACS searches."

Bloom said that the linguists are now on two separate systems. The first system is used to produce the "tech cut" and the second is used for administrative e-mail. They can use a toggle switch to go between systems. Bloom said they are working to integrate all of the programs into the main FBI system, which will help them disseminate their work more easily. She said that at present hard copies are still printed and disseminated.

**Training.** Bloom indicated that the LSs could use more training, particularly to improve their analytical capabilities. She has orchestrated some CIA training at WFO with

instructors from CIA University. She said that a Counterintelligence CD was created at Quantico to create a "virtual academy" on the FCI program. Bloom said that there has been a proliferation of training at the CIA and that someone from her squad went over "last week." Bloom said that more training could be provided to linguists with respect to their role as frontline intelligence collectors. She says that she has a large squad, but that she tries to give her staff quizzes to help her linguists learn, but that the overall training could be much better. Such quizzes include minimization procedures and the Patriot Act. She said that she and the Supervisory Language Specialist do everything they can with respect to training. She faces resources constraints for language training, but said that Quantico is starting to do more on interpretation. She said that the CIA does training on how to do an analytic summary – to describe succinctly what is critical.

**Minimization/Legal Requirements.** Title III information is generally handled by the case agent; the LS will type up the translation and hand it off to the Agent. When asked to what extent the minimization requirements hinder the work, Bloom indicated that the LSs will undergo 2 more training sessions on the limitations under the Patriot Act (including, for example, how to handle attorney-client conversations). The National Security Law Unit (NSLU), and Homer Pointer in particular, has given them pointers on what they can and can't do. The Patriot Act "has given us more latitude than ever before." Bloom indicated that they still frequently consult with an one of the Division Counsels – usually Duncan Wainwright – about the requirements.

**Headquarters role.** Bloom indicated that they get more calls now from the CT and CI analysts at HQ and that they now seek to speak directly with the linguists more than ever. Also, more than the tech cuts, the analysts are getting summaries from the linguists directly on e-mail. Bloom indicated that good dialogue is needed to ensure that HQ and case Agents aren't working at cross purposes. "We need to share information. We also need to make sure that people have a need to know."

**Access to and processing of "Take."** Bloom said that, due to technological advances, the FBI has been able to get access to more communications than ever. She said that they do e-mail 3 times more than FISA intercepts. She said that it creates a huge data control/management problem: How do we prioritize the information so that the linguist is not swamped? She said that they use "human filters" as well as "software" filters to do machine translation, which is only 70% accurate. Accurate computer translation software is not available.

With respect to Arabic intercepts, Bloom indicated that about 25% of the take is e-mail, 50% is "traditional FISA telephone taps," and 25% is documents. She said that email and instant messaging is growing.

**Comparison with Linguist Program at CIA, NSA.** Bloom noted that the CIA provides training in critical thinking skills to its linguists. She wants to compare the rates of pay for linguists at the three agencies; she doesn't want the FBI outbid by them (but she noted that the FBI gives them a lot of overtime). She wants to look for other ways to improve what the linguists do (although she recognized that this was normally a HQ

responsibility). She said that the NSA does much more analytical work than we do. She doesn't know enough about how the CIA does it, although the FBI sometimes uses the CIA for testers. She said the FBI has a reputation for having higher standards. She lamented that it was impossible to get to GS-13 as a non-supervisory linguist.

**Regarding 9/11.** Bloom said the criticism of the FBI for the failure to prevent 9/11 hit home. Her view is that none of what we knew would have prevented it and that no intelligence agency could have prevented it. "The dots were not there." She said the FBI could improve in some areas – particularly the analytical apparatus.

**Recommendations.** Bloom proposed the creation of an impartial, but demanding, oversight body to evaluate interagency capabilities. She said that every agency is out for "their own orientation," and that this needs to be addressed in order to improve our security. She said that the USG need someone who will make demands of the overall intelligence community and who can force cooperation.

With respect to "getting more dots," she said that more people, more agents are needed. She felt that as an agent she had a "pretty good idea" of what everyone else was doing. But there was never enough there, she said; "security will never be perfect."

Bloom noted that the Director is putting criminal agents into the international terrorism area. She said the criminal agent disposition is to go out and neutralize the threat.

Finally, she said that the acquisition of good filtering software would be very helpful to them in order to help them identify certain words and prioritize what they focus on – get rid of the noise.