

MEK 04019884

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event:

Type of Event: Interview of [redacted] (Language Specialist, Washington Field Office)

Date: August 1, 2003

Special Access Issues: None

Prepared by: Michael Jacobson

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Team number: 6

Location: FBI, Washington Field Office

Participants Non-Commission: Assistant General Counsel Jonathan Sills

Participants - Commission: John Tamm and Michael Jacobson

Background

[redacted] has a BA from Punjab University in India, and a Masters in English literature from an Indian University. He came to the United States in 1979, when a relative agreed to sponsor him. In 1980, he began working as a teller at a bank, but soon after went to work in sales. He then went to management training, but left to join the FBI. [redacted] mentioned that he speaks Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu.

[redacted] received an offer FBI from the FBI in 1988 to work as a Language Specialist in the LA Office. He worked there for 2 years, primarily on Sikh terrorism. Most of the Sikh terrorism investigations were on the West Coast, because that was where most of the Sikhs live in the U.S. He came to WFO in March of 1990, and has worked as a Language Specialist at WFO since that time.

Current assignment

His current responsibilities are mostly to translate Punjabi for terrorism cases. Punjabi is a very important language for CT work, since 80% of Pakistanis speak Punjabi. In India, only those who live in the state of Punjab speak Punjabi. In 1990, the FBI had only 4 Punjabi translators throughout the organization. As a result, he traveled frequently, both throughout the U.S. and overseas. Now almost every office has at least 1-2 Punjabi speakers, and WFO has 8.

Technology

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The current technology is such that he does not have to travel as frequently any more. The FBI's technology is cutting edge in his area. As soon as there is new technology, the FBI goes out and gets it. The FBI uses [redacted] which can be [redacted]

[redacted] The FBI has had this type of technology for about three years now.

FISA minimization procedures

[redacted] described the FISA minimization procedures. He will talk to the case agent when the FISA is being implemented. The agent will give him background and guidance on what they are looking for. They are then supposed to listen to the call to decide whether it's pertinent, and if not, don't listen to the whole thing. This can be difficult. For example, people may be having long conversations about social matters, and then at the end provide a detail of importance, such as information about an upcoming trip. That's why there are cases where you have to listen to the entire call to see whether or not it's pertinent. Most of the time, however, they don't really have the time to listen to the entire call.

Dissemination of written translations

There is no specific time limit as to when they have to get the write ups to the case agents. There are times when he will call the case agent to let them know about particularly important information from an intercept, but a lot of calls are very routine. These days they will generally send the write ups to the agents through email. In many cases, there are agents in different cities working on the investigation, and he'll send a copy to each one. They also keep one copy of the write up for themselves as well. [redacted] is not certain as to whether his written translations are put onto a database. He thinks that if they do the case agent would have access to it.

Access to relevant intelligence and intelligence databases

He does not have access to ACS. They may be getting access, in which case they would be trained on it. The idea of access to ACS for the language specialists is a new issue, and just came up within the last month. He has access to the FBI Intranet, but not to any Intelligence Community databases, such as Intelink, CT Link, etc. [redacted] stated that he does not receive any analytic products. He thinks that it's the job of the agents to analyze the significance of the particular intercepts, and they give the translations straight to the case agents. The analysts receive a copy of the translation, and there is an analyst for every case agent. He knows the analysts are receiving copies of the write ups because he will often receive phone calls from analysts to verify spelling of names. He tries to use consistent spelling for his subjects' names, but it's impossible to come up with a standardized list. People spell their names differently. He also noted that the first thing that people from Pakistan and India do when they come to the U.S. is change their last name.

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[redacted] was asked how he stays abreast of investigative and program developments. He responded that in a big case he reads about it every day in the newspaper. He gets copies of the Pakistani/Indian regional newspapers which have good stories on these cases. When he is assigned a new case, the case agent will give him background about the case. He is told who the person is, and what information they have on them. If there are important developments, the case agent will tell him about them. For example, they will say that they heard there was a fight in the temple, and he should see if the subject's name is mentioned. He doesn't see copies of 302s or other documents from the investigation. He is shown a copy of the initial FISA affidavit, but not of the renewal packages. He would however, be told if a FISA was extended.

[redacted] would like to be better informed as to what's going on in the investigations. He would like to know things such as: what happened with the information he provides to the case agents, was it useful, what were the results of the investigation, and did they achieve anything?

Changes in priorities and role for language specialists since 9/11

[redacted] stated that his job has not changed since 9/11. The priorities of the FBI have changed. CT matters used to be placed on the back burner in some cases. Since 9/11, this doesn't happen any more. The CT FISAs and translations are now done right away. In many cases, [redacted] [redacted] emphasized that it's not only Al-Qa'ida cases that are being given high priority, but all CT cases. The language specialists have no input on FISA target selection. He doesn't have a problem with that. He's not sure if SSA Bloom has input.

[redacted] spent a month or so in GITMO interviewing the Punjabi speaking individuals in custody. He doesn't think that he'll be going back. In general though, he rarely travels any more. About 90% of his work is intercepts (and writing them up) and about 10% is document translation. He doesn't know whether this ratio is typical for Arabic speakers. [redacted] said that most of his work is for other FBI field offices. He talks to the agents involved "quite frequently."

[redacted] FCI is not on the back burner because he's working CT related establishments.

[redacted] does not know much about the language specialists at FBI HQ. He thinks that they are primarily looking at documents, and don't deal as much with the agents.

Interaction with NSA

[redacted] doesn't know at all about what NSA does. He thinks that it's possible that [redacted] [redacted] It could be helpful if

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there was coordination. Maybe there is so much volume that there is not much overlap and it's good that both are doing this type of work.

Role of HQ Language Services Division

He doesn't deal with the language specialists at HQ. He does have complaints about the Language Services Division at HQ. When field offices want a language specialist for a TDY they have to go through HQ to request permission. He thinks that there is favoritism in the selection process. Some people who are not qualified are being sent overseas because of their personal connections. He thinks that this favoritism has been well documented. This has been a problem for about 3 years, and he attributes it to whomever is making assignments. [] gave an example of what he has witnessed: there is one individual who was hired as a Hindi and Gujarati language specialist and then went to work at HQ. He understands very little Punjabi. Despite this, he went overseas to interview a source who spoke Punjabi. He was unable to understand what the source was saying. Six months later he was sent TDY to another country, and the Embassy there said that if he was sent again it would be an insult. The individual at HQ who approved this trip was [] claimed that this analyst was the only person available, which [] regards as nonsense. [] wrote up his complaints and gave them to his supervisor [] who then sent the report to [] [] then complained to SSA Bloom, and just gave her a copy of the memo yesterday. [] is concerned that this situation is making the FBI look very bad and lose credibility. In addition, given that this individual is working on CT cases, he thinks that this is downright dangerous. He does not think that this is an isolated case and has heard from others about similar problems.

[] said that the language services division at HQ sets the standards for the language specialists. They also test the people when they come on board for proficiency. The problem is that they don't test linguists writing and reading ability. This has not been a part of the test (perhaps until recently). There are cases of individuals hired who don't read or speak the language well. He is not aware of any Punjabi speakers at WFO, but thinks there may be one in New York. He thinks that it's important to be a native speaker. There are some language specialists who do not speak or write English well, which is also a problem. He doesn't know whether or not they are tested in English when they come on board. He speaks Punjabi to other language specialists in the Bureau to maintain his proficiency.

[] does not agree with Sybel Edmonds' allegations. Edmonds claimed that supervisors were encouraging her to work slowly. He thinks that there is nothing there, and that she is totally wrong. A supervisor would never do this, in his opinion.

Training

He has not had much training, as such. Once a month or so, WFO has been bringing in a speaker, and this has been helpful. They do receive computer training

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whenever they receive something new. There is a language specialist training committee at WFO, and they provide training for the new hires.

Career development and retention

Language Specialist positions used to be eligible for GS-12s, and now it's a 13. However, [redacted] complained that it's almost impossible for the language specialists to satisfy the criterion for the GS-13. For example, they don't have the time to conduct the interviews required for promotion. They are also required to show that they have translated items of a certain level of difficulty, which there is no way to do in the course of their daily routine. The only cases where people have gotten promoted to a GS-13 is in cases of favoritism. There is a German translator named [redacted] who has been promoted, despite the fact that she is no better than the other German translators. The 4 supervisors at WFO are GS-13s. [redacted] is still a GS-12. As far as retention, [redacted] stated that "no one ever leaves." Very few language specialists leave; it's a career position.

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