

The FBI's Field Intelligence Groups and Police Joining Forces

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Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, managing and sharing timely threat information and strategic and tactical intelligence with state and local officials have become primary concerns of the federal government. In its final report, the 9/11 Commission stated that “intelligence gathered about transnational terrorism should be processed, turned into reports, and distributed according to the same quality standards, whether it is collected in Pakistan or in Texas.”¹ The report

went on to say that the FBI should build a reciprocal relationship with state and local agencies, maximizing the sharing of information.²

In reflection of its emphasis on this goal, the FBI is making major changes. In September 2003, Director Robert Mueller ordered the creation of Field Intelligence Groups (FIGs) in all 56 field offices. FIGs constitute a centerpiece of the FBI’s transition toward combining its intelligence and investigative capabilities and serve a critical role in the agency’s intelligence

function. The groups work closely with the FBI-led Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTFs), various field office squads, and other agency components to provide valuable service to law enforcement personnel at the state and local levels.

Effective Structure

Overseen by the FBI’s Directorate of Intelligence,³ FIGs generally consist of special agents, intelligence analysts, linguists, and other members of the law enforcement and intelligence communities.



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While this basic structure remains largely consistent throughout the FBI's field offices, some FIGs have created new ways to address their critical mission.

FIGs manage the intelligence cycle in the FBI's field offices, integrating it with investigations so that local, state, and federal law enforcement and intelligence community agencies can benefit. FIGs identify intelligence gaps; obtain and analyze raw intelligence from FBI investigations and sources; and generate intelligence products and disseminate them to the intelligence and law enforcement communities to help guide investigative, program, and policy decisions.

One former police chief, now an assistant director with the FBI, considers the development of FIGs a positive move forward because they promote an environment of information

sharing between federal, state, and local agencies. He emphasizes that in addition to being consumers of information, FIGs provide it as well. The role of the FIG, in part, is to help make sense of intelligence, thereby assisting state and local police in their own analysis. FIGs can review data from all jurisdictions in a particular geographic area or nationwide and identify patterns or trends that police, isolated in their own municipalities, may not see. Personnel keep information in the respective field offices (unless, of course, it affects other areas of the country) and discuss it with local police.

Efficient Communication

In the wake of the September 11 attacks, the FBI's ability to communicate with other law enforcement agencies has improved significantly. Its efforts in the Washington, D.C., area

serve as an example. Home to important government buildings, monuments, and more than 500,000 people, the nation's capital represents an attractive terrorist target. To address the important issue of how to communicate strategic and tactical intelligence and potential threat information quickly across federal and local jurisdictions, the FBI's Washington field office (WFO) FIG reaches out to some 40 federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies through a weekly conference call to brief metropolitan area officers on counterterrorism matters that could affect the city and the surrounding area. Police chiefs have valued the opportunity to receive briefings from the FBI and to communicate with their peers on a weekly basis.

Also, WFO special agents meet with police chiefs face-to-face and stay in regular contact with them through e-mails and telephone calls. The office has divided Washington, D.C., and northern Virginia into zones and assigned personnel to each one. Agents hold responsibility for establishing liaison with heads of police departments, hospitals, key businesses, security agencies, and others in their zones. If the need arises, WFO can simultaneously page every police chief in the metropolitan area and quickly initiate

a conference call to relay critical information.

Timely Dissemination

FIGs provide valuable up-to-date intelligence to the law enforcement community. For instance, WFO's FIG produces weekly intelligence bulletins and posts them on the Law Enforcement Online (LEO) Web site. Any police officer in the United States with access to the JTTF page of LEO can read them. In addition to general information, each bulletin contains a summary of potential threats, stolen items, and suspicious activities reported to the JTTF by citizens and police departments. These bulletins allow law enforcement executives to determine if similar crimes and suspicious activities are being reported in other jurisdictions.

The FIG analyst who writes the bulletin serves as the contact and receives numerous daily e-mails from police departments. Often, these messages contain general questions or requests for case-specific intelligence. Agencies that do not have a detailee on the JTTF or a contact at the FIG can communicate with personnel via a hotline. Law enforcement officers can relay their departments' intelligence needs to the FIG; personnel in the group then can determine a collection and production strategy.

FIGs also produce in-depth intelligence assessments of, for example, a particular crime problem. Information may come from classified sources, police tips, arrests, or crimes. Analysts remove references to sources and methods of collection, conduct analysis, and release a product via LEO, the National Law Enforcement Telecommunications System (NLETS), or

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direct e-mail to cleared recipients. Agencies find such products useful. For example, a police department may pass the intelligence along to patrol officers who could come across suspicious terrorist-related activity.

Variety of Intelligence

Far from focusing only on terrorism, FIGs also produce and disseminate intelligence pertaining to cyber, counterintelligence, and criminal programs. For example, WFO has

personnel who specialize in violent crime and gangs and has been working to increase the amount of intelligence it gathers on subjects, such as what happens at gang meetings, who the local leaders are, and how an order to kill an individual is set. WFO strives to develop methods of collection and recruit sources, such as individuals who attend gang meetings, that will help the FBI gather such intelligence.

In one recent instance, a northern Virginia gang member threatened to kill a police officer. WFO received this information from a source who had been gathering intelligence on a particular gang. Additional information from this individual revealed that the person who made the threat was attempting to obtain a gun. Police were not able to arrest the man for threatening the officer, but the FBI passed the information to local police, who eventually arrested him for driving while intoxicated. This charge placed him in violation of his parole, and the two charges combined may result in several years of jail time.

In recent years, the Mara Salvatrucha gang, also known as MS-13, has become a problem for law enforcement in Washington, D.C., and northern Virginia. FBI intelligence gathered from sources and shared with local police has

been used to clear cases of physical assaults and murders involving this vicious gang. In one instance, MS-13 members badly beat a victim in a local park. Source information helped local police identify a suspect, and a warrant was issued for his arrest.

Also, WFO can coordinate with personnel in the FBI's Los Angeles field office (LAFO), where MS-13 long has been a fixture in gang-related crime. Working with intelligence from LAFO's FIG helps WFO pass along valuable information to police in Washington, D.C., and northern Virginia. For example, WFO and its FIG receive information on MS-13 members who are traveling from Los Angeles to help organize gangs on the East Coast. Frontline officers benefit by tapping into these intelligence resources. In addition to providing such information, the FBI can help "connect the dots" between the different police departments.

Valuable Police Training

FIGs also provide valuable training to state and local agencies. The efforts of the FBI's Dallas, Texas, field office serve as an example. In one instance, the north Texas law enforcement community had questions regarding the Violent Gang and Terrorist Organization File (VGTOF), one of several contained in the automated National Crime Information

Center database. As police know, they can use VGTOF to run names during traffic stops and other arrests to find out whether the individual, for example, is wanted for drug offenses or listed on a terrorist watchlist. The Dallas FIG offered training on how to respond when an individual's name registers as a positive hit on VGTOF for suspected terrorist activity. As a result, police now can use these electronic messages more effectively.

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Emergency Response Network

The Dallas field office and its FIG have established an emergency response network (ERN) that connects the FIG with more than 500 law enforcement agencies in the greater north Texas area. The ERN Web site allows the FIG to receive and provide critical information. Approximately

2,000 police and critical infrastructure business leaders have been cleared and given passwords to go beyond the home page to receive information from the FBI, such as intelligence bulletins and assessments. For example, north Texas utilities executives can learn about the concerns of other large utilities around the country, such as the Nevada power company that reported the loosening of bolts on transmission towers, through the ERN.

Also, members of law enforcement, the business community, and the general public can use the ERN to contact the FIG and provide information of potential interest. To ensure a quick response, some personnel wear pagers that alert them to the e-mail if certain key words are used. In one incident, a local company that makes bomb casings for the military suspected an act of sabotage within its plant. The company sent a message to the Dallas FIG on the ERN, and, within 10 minutes, a special agent responded with a telephone call to the company to obtain more information. Within 30 minutes, an agent arrived at the plant to investigate. The ERN also was used to report a number of suspicious incidents in which witnesses saw individuals taking pictures of critical infrastructure equipment, such as transformers, in

The FBI's Intelligence Cycle

- *Requirements*: identifying information needs, based on critical data required to protect the United States from national security and criminal threats
- *Planning and direction*: managing the entire intelligence effort, from identifying the need for information to delivering a finished product to a consumer
- *Collection*: gathering raw information based on requirements (includes activities, such as interviews, surveillances, human source operation, searches, and liaison relationships)
- *Processing and exploitation*: converting collected information into a form usable by analysts through a variety of methods, including decryption, language translation, and data reduction
- *Analysis and production*: transforming raw information into intelligence (includes integrating, evaluating, and analyzing available data and preparing products)
- *Dissemination*: distributing raw or finished intelligence to consumers



Source: <http://www.fbi.gov/intelligence/process.htm>

the north Texas area. One such situation involved a utility company representative e-mailing the license plate number of a suspect's vehicle over the ERN and receiving a same-day response from the FBI. Internet hacking incidents also have been reported via the network.

The ERN was used to send out mass e-mails in several situations. For example, when FBI Headquarters released a notice that the Department of Homeland Security planned to raise the national threat level during the 2003 Christmas season, the Dallas field office

made area law enforcement authorities aware of the decision in advance. Police received an e-mail through the ERN letting them know that the change in the threat level would be announced to the media in 2 hours. Further, the e-mail gave some information on the reasons behind the decision and helped area police departments lessen the anxiety for their employees and the public.

Computers and Policing

Cybercrime represents another area in which FIGs are creating new ways to share intelligence with state and local

police. For instance, in Dallas, authorities investigated an Internet fraud complaint in which the complainant told police he purchased \$5,300 worth of merchandise from a local business but never received the goods. The investigating officer contacted the Dallas FIG. When personnel entered the case information into a specialized database, it matched an ongoing FBI investigation into the same business. If the match had involved, for instance, two police departments in different areas, the FBI would have put the appropriate officers in touch with each

other. It then would have been up to the two investigators to decide which agency should take the lead in the case and how to share information.

This system works well with cybercases in which jurisdiction becomes an issue due to the location of suspects, witnesses, and Internet servers in different areas.

The Dallas FIG also is adding child pornography cases to the database, with the goal of having the system go nationwide so that police departments can coordinate their cases with counterparts in other areas of the country. Of course, agency participation will determine

how fast the database expands and how useful police will find it.

Conclusion

Now, more than ever, the FBI understands the need to share intelligence—pertaining not only to terrorism but also other crimes, such as gang activity, fraud, child pornography, and cargo theft. The ability to communicate and disseminate intelligence through FIGs has proven effective, greatly improving coordination between agencies at the federal, state, and local levels and helping personnel solve crimes and make arrests.

Of course, many difficult tasks lie ahead. But, by working together, law enforcement personnel can rest assured that they are doing all they can to obtain and share information that will help them protect the citizens they serve. ♦

Endnotes

¹ National Commission on Terror Attacks Upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (Washington, DC, 2004), 427.

² *Ibid.*, 417.

³ The FBI's Directorate of Intelligence (formerly known as the Office of Intelligence) was established in January 2003 to promote and standardize the agency's efforts to collect, analyze, and share intelligence.

The *Bulletin's* E-mail Address

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