

Sibel D Edmonds

10/06/04

Glenn A. Fine, Inspector General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Suite 4322
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Mr. Fine:

I have reviewed the recently released redacted and unclassified version of your department's audit of the FBI's Foreign Language Program. Your report helps to bring badly needed attention to serious problems within the FBI's translation department; problems that must be corrected for the department to be effective in its role on the front line of the war on terror. As you are aware, over two years ago I reported serious issues and problems within the FBI's translation units, with serious consequences to our national security and the war on terror. I am still awaiting the results of your long due report on the specific cases and issues I reported to your office and to the United States Senate. On one hand, this report draws attention to the problem of backlog of untranslated intelligence by putting forth shocking numbers. On the other hand, other equally or more serious problems with even more significant consequences were completely ignored. Inaccurate translations due to incompetence and/or intentional acts, Intelligence sabotaged by high security risk translators with questionable loyalties, criminal activities ranging from serious security breaches to facilitating the acts of sabotage, corrupt hiring practices, and serious mismanagement are among those issues that greatly impact the reliability and integrity of intelligence gathered and analyzed on the front lines, for as you state in the report *'The FBI's linguists play a critical role in developing effective intelligence and Counterterrorism information. Linguists are the first line of analysis for information collected in a language other than English.'*

Your report **omitted** information regarding tens of thousands of inaccurately translated documents. As you are fully aware, intentional mistranslations and mistranslations due to incompetence constitute a significant portion of the FBI's translated intelligence. According to your report *'more than 89,000 hours of audio and 30,000 hours of audio in other Counterterrorism languages have not been reviewed. Additionally, over 370,000 hours of audio in languages associated with counterintelligence activities have not been reviewed.'* Although these numbers by themselves are appalling, this data is misleading and not nearly complete, since it fails to also address the fact that of those documents considered translated many were inaccurately translated, and the fact that of those documents considered reviewed but were found 'not pertinent to be translated' by translators, many were, and are, pertinent. The following are but a few questions and examples:

What is the number of 'translated documents/audio' that were inaccurately translated due to incompetence and unqualified translators?

Example 1: Three Iranian translators were given the task of translating sensitive intelligence (both audio and documents) in another Middle Eastern language for over 5 years. These translators were not qualified in that language (had no training, had no background) in any way, and repeatedly

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refused to submit to proficiency exams requested by the FBI-HQ. The agent in charge of that particular Middle Eastern country repeatedly complained and then notified the FBI-HQ of the potential dire consequences that could result from inaccurate translations performed by these translators. Tens of thousands of pages inaccurately translated (mistranslated) by these individuals over the years are considered translated in your audit and by the FBI, and is thus misleading. Exactly how many pages are these mistranslated documents/audio, which should be added to the backlog your report depicts, since these documents have to be reviewed/retranslated?

Example 2: Kevin Taskesen (as confirmed by the Congress, the FBI, and the press) was given the task of translating intelligence (audio, documents, in person interviews of detainees/suspects) in certain Middle Eastern languages, despite the fact that he had failed ALL proficiency exams, both in English and a target language. Mr. Taskesen was even sent to Guantanamo Bay for two months to translate intelligence gathered from several detainees from several countries. Tens of thousands of documents/audio were and are being mistranslated by Mr. Taskesen. Today, three years after this issue was reported, Mr. Taskesen is still in charge of translating intelligence in the FBI Washington Field Office. Exactly how many pages are these mistranslated documents/audio, which should be added to the backlog your report depicts, since these documents have to be reviewed/retranslated? Shouldn't the FBI send a new translator(s) to Guantanamo Bay to re-interview/retranslate intelligence gathered inaccurately by individuals like Mr. Taskesen? What is the statistical data for this?

Example 3: Immediately following September 11, intelligence translation of languages spoken in Afghanistan were given to Farsi translators who did not understand that country's languages, did not qualify to translate for those languages, and were never administered proficiency exams in those languages. The FBI sent some of those translators to Afghanistan immediately following the September 11 attack. Documents/audio translated by these individuals are considered inaccurate/unreliable by FBI standards, Court Standards, and any other intelligence standards. Exactly how many pages are these mistranslated documents/audio, which should be added to the backlog your report depicts, since these documents have to be reviewed/retranslated? Where is the damage assessment for this inaccurately translated intelligence/information from the battlegrounds of our War Against Terror in Afghanistan?

What was the number of 'translated documents/audio' that were inaccurately translated or blocked by being stamped as '*Reviewed but NOT Pertinent to be Translated*', due to intentional acts by certain translators who were hired despite their previous and ongoing ties with the targets of investigations and/or ideological sympathy for the targets of investigations?

Example 1: As it has been confirmed by the Congress, the FBI, and the media, Melek Can Dickerson was hired, given Top Secret Clearance, and placed in charge of translating sensitive intelligence (including terrorist targets) by the bureau, despite her previous membership/job with certain target organizations and her on-going relationship with individuals who were the targets of FBI investigations. Based on confirmations by the FBI and the United States Congress, Ms. Dickerson in fact blocked and mistranslated intelligence gathered from these targets. Exactly how many pages are these intentionally mistranslated/blocked documents/audio, which should be added to the backlog your report depicts, since these documents have to be reviewed/retranslated?

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Example 2: As reported by John M. Cole (reported to the DOJ-IG and the United States Congress, and later reported by the press), manager for Counterintelligence Operations covering Pakistan, Afghanistan and India at the FBI HQ, several translators from these regions, who had ties/relationship with targets of FBI investigations and were found to be significant security risks, were hired by the FBI and placed in charge of translating intelligence in languages from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India. In one case the translator's father was among the members of a FBI target organization, and in another case, the FBI discovered that one translator had been providing FBI Top Secret information to a foreign intelligence service. Did your audit review and/or retranslate the documents/audio translated by these individuals? Exactly how many pages are these intentionally mistranslated/blocked documents/audio, which should be added to the backlog your report depicts, since these documents have to be reviewed/retranslated?

Your report does **not** address serious misconducts and flaws in translators hiring practices. As you are fully aware, as confirmed by the FBI and the United States Congress and the media, FBI hiring practices of linguists are **not** merit based, and are infested with nepotism/cronyism. Linguist position slots are filled by many incompetent and/or 'high security risk' individuals entering through the back door, preventing qualified applicants from obtaining those positions. According to your report *'contract linguist vetting process includes language proficiency testing, a personnel security interview, a polygraph examination, and a background investigation. Only upon the successful completion of all stages of the vetting process are contract linguist applicants approved and granted a Top Secret security clearance.'* This is completely inaccurate.

With regard to the FBI hiring of translators, how many translators were hired through the back door with total disregard of their security risk and/or lack of qualifications, due to nepotism/cronyism?

Example 1: Arabic translators hired for positions at the FBI Washington Field Office. One of the supervisors at the FBI Washington Field Office, Mike Feghali, who is in charge of Middle Eastern languages including Arabic, brought in numerous full-time and contract translators who were family members and friends. Some of these individuals were openly celebrating the terrorist attacks on September 11, several did not possess standard qualifications, and many drew salaries without even showing up for work. How many qualified Arabic speaking applicants were turned down by the FBI due to these job slots being filled by back door hiring of unqualified and/or security risk translators?

Example 2: The FBI-HQ hired Mr. Taskesen being fully aware of his proficiency exam results: that he failed even the most elementary English Level, that he even failed target language proficiency due to a limited elementary school education. Mr. Taskesen's wife worked, and still works, for the FBI-HQ Language Test department, and the FBI disregarded other job applicants so that Mr. Taskesen could be hired. In return, Ms. Taskesen forged the test results of proficiency exams for family members/friends of other FBI employees who also applied for these jobs. How many qualified linguist applicants were turned down by the FBI due to these job slots being filled by back door hiring of unqualified and/or security risk translators?

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Example 3: FBI-Washington Field Office hired three Farsi translators and placed these individuals on *Over-Time Pay* for a Middle Eastern language other than Farsi. These individuals refused to be tested, their direct Special Agent Supervisor complained to the HQ about their inability to carry out the task, and other translators filed complaints about the damage caused to the integrity of the department by allowing these individuals to keep their positions. Yet, the FBI HQ and Washington Field Office allowed these translators to remain in those positions for over five years. These three translators mistranslated tens of thousands of pages of documents over five years for FBI Counterintelligence, Counterterrorism, and Criminal cases. The FBI –HQ and Washington Field Office knowingly allowed this to continue for over five years.

- ◆ In how many court cases (Criminal, Counterintelligence, and/or Counterterrorism) did the FBI use inaccurately translated documents/audio as evidence to prosecute? Have the defense attorneys of at least the known cases been notified?
- ◆ In how many cases (Criminal, Counterintelligence, and/or Counterterrorism), did the FBI use inaccurately translated documents/audio as evidence to obtain warrants, to obtain FISA, to investigate, to detain, and/or to prosecute individuals?
- ◆ In how many cases were people actually detained, arrested, prosecuted based on mistranslated evidence presented by the FBI?

With regard to the thorough background check process for linguist applicants claimed by the FBI and your audit report, how many translators were hired despite the significant and known security risk they posed? How many of these translators were investigated/prosecuted after they were found to have been engaged in espionage activities against the United States, to have breached security, and/or to have intentionally blocked and mistranslated vital intelligence?

Example 1: In your report Re: Double Standards of Discipline, your report found a translator who had an on going ‘close relationship’ with the FBI target of investigation who this translator was translating intelligence from; who received money and gifts of value from the FBI target of investigation. Did the FBI conduct damage assessment, after this individual was caught? Did they have thousands of pages of intelligence that were translated by this individual retranslated? How many pages were blocked and/or mistranslated? Has there been any criminal investigation/prosecution of this case? Has there been any assessment of background security check loopholes leading to granting Top Secret Clearance to this individual?

Example 2: As mentioned above and confirmed by the Congress and the FBI, Melek Can Dickerson was hired and granted Top Secret Clearance despite the fact that she lied in her job application about her previous employments that were targets of FBI investigations, that she and her husband had on going personal and business relationships with FBI targets. Ms. Dickerson maintained her position and clearance even after the FBI confirmed that she had intentionally blocked and mistranslated intelligence/information related to the individuals and organizations she had ties with, and after two FBI targets were tipped off and hastily left the United States. Did

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the FBI conduct damage assessment, after this individual's case became known and public? Did they have thousands of pages of intelligence that were translated by this individual retranslated? How many pages were blocked and/or mistranslated? Has there been any criminal investigation/prosecution of this case? Has there been any assessment of background security check loopholes leading to granting Top Secret Clearance to this individual?

Example 3: According to John M. Cole, FBI Counterintelligence Operations Manager, who worked in the FBI's Washington, D.C. Headquarters and was assigned to do risk assessments on applicants for translator positions, after notifying the FBI HQ regarding a translator applicant with ties to FBI targets of investigation and strongly recommending against hiring this translator: "I was told, 'Not that it matters now, she's already been hired and has just started to work in the Washington, D.C., Field Office.' What's more, she had been given Top Secret clearance." Also, according to Cole, "there were as many as 12 additional applicants hired as language specialists, whose files he had personally inspected, that showed red flags for various reasons. These also were not properly vetted." How many other cases of 'High-Security Risk Translators' were brought to the attention of the FBI, where no action, no investigations, and no damage assessment measures were taken?

With regard to the 'quality control' issue pointed out in your report, in how many cases was the absence of conducting a quality review process not due to a shortage problem, but due to an intentional decision to protect unqualified translators and to cover up intentional actions/security breaches?

During my work with the FBI as a translator for several languages I was rarely asked to have my work reviewed or to review the work of others, and this was not in any way caused by lack of time or shortage of translators. This was the case not only with languages in demand, but for all languages. Even when due to a request by an agent quality reviews were performed, negative results were immediately covered up in order to avoid raising red flags or bringing the translation department under scrutiny. The lack or rarity of quality reviews is an intentional and conscious measure practiced by administrative managers/supervisors to avoid having larger problems/issues exposed.

Accountability is **not** mentioned even once in your report. It is the difficulty of hiring. It is the lack of newer/better computer systems. It is the large amount of intelligence pouring in. It is insufficient funding. It is not the supervisors, some intentionally, being incompetent and/or irresponsible. It is not those in charge of hiring allowing backdoor entries and qualifying those not qualified for these important tasks. It is not certain people in charge of personnel security and/or security background checks dropping the ball, either intentionally or due to incompetence.

Considering the facts, cases, and issues mentioned above, why does your audit report completely refrain from even mentioning individual accountability, for managerial/personnel incompetence, criminal conducts, failures?

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Who are the known incompetent translators? Who are the translators who have completely failed proficiency exams/tests? Why were they hired despite failing in their proficiency tests? Why did they remain in their position, and still do? Why did your audit omit these cases?

Who are the individuals/managers in the FBI testing departments intentionally forging and covering up test results to facilitate hiring of incompetent translators, thus preventing qualified ones from getting hired? Why do they remain in their positions? Why did your audit omit these cases?

Who are the individuals/managers in the FBI hiring department intentionally and knowingly facilitating the hiring of incompetent and unqualified translators for nepotism/cronyism? Why do they remain in their positions? Why did your audit omit these cases?

Who are the agents/security experts in charge of conducting background security checks either intentionally or due to incompetence clearing 'high risk' translators for these highly sensitive positions? Why do they remain in their positions? Why did your audit omit these cases?

Who are the individuals/managers in the hiring department intentionally ignoring the warnings of background check authorities and security assessment results regarding certain translators? Why do they remain in their positions? Why did your audit omit these cases?

Who is the administrative supervisor in charge of FBI Washington Field Office Middle Eastern languages, who encourages backlog creation for the purpose of receiving budget and staff increases, thus hindering our war on terror? Why does he remain in his position? Why did your audit omit his and others' cases?

Who is/are the administrative supervisor(s) in charge of the FBI Washington Field Office Middle Eastern languages, who facilitate and intentionally cover up security breaches, intentional mistranslations, and negative quality review results? Why do they remain in their positions? Why did your audit omit these cases?

Who is/are the mid-level managers in the FBI-HQ and Washington Field Office, who intentionally send inaccurate 'translation review results' to the FBI-Field Offices requesting translation review/audit due to suspicious translations received, and doing so intentionally in order to save face? Why do they remain in their positions? Why did your audit omit these cases?

The omission of these serious issues, the bypassing of accountability, and reducing the real problems to those of manpower shortage, budget shortage, and antiquated technology results not in addressing and fixing problems and bringing about needed change, but in insuring the continuation and expansion of these problems. This is a classic example of Pavlovian Conditioning: mismanagement of the agency is rewarded by budget increases; inefficiency is addressed by staff increases; basically, failures are rewarded. What type of incentive does this provide the agency to address problems and improve its management and performance? What will happen when three years from now your next audit reveals backlog numbers far more startling than the current ones?

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The FBI can be confident that it will be rewarded with another round of recommendations for an increased budget and increased staff, thus expanding its inefficient and failing machine further.

Respectfully,

Sibel D. Edmonds

CC: Senator Charles Grassley

CC: Senator Patrick Leahy

CC: Senator Susan Collins

CC: Senator Orrin Hatch

CC: Senator Dianne Feinstein

CC: Congressman Frank Wolf