

“Gathering Multidisciplinary Information for the Policy-Making Community”

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The Federal Research Division (FRD) is part of the Collections and Services Directorate and has long been associated organizationally with the area studies divisions of the Library of Congress. As a specialized research unit, FRD is involved in the acquisitions process in a different way from most other parts of the Library. FRD is an exploiter of the Library’s collections in the broadest sense of the term. By profiting from the Library’s holdings and, in some cases, having the Library’s acquisitions staff obtain materials not in the collections but needed for FRD reports, the division contributes to the general collection development process.

Within the Library of Congress, FRD is analogous to the Congressional Research Service (CRS), the dedicated research arm of the U.S. Congress, and to the Law Library, which provides research findings to the Congress and other government agencies. In much the same way that CRS and the Law Library respond to requests from Congress for information, FRD does the same for the Executive branch and, occasionally, for the Judiciary. Unlike CRS and the Law Library, FRD does not do any research and analysis on its own initiative. Rather, the division performs customized research as directed by our clients in the Federal government on a full-cost-recovery basis. FRD work for hire is tailored to specific client agency requirements. But, very much like CRS and the Law Library, FRD holds itself to a high standard of objectivity and independence in the reported results of its research. The subjects of research are directed by the client agency, but our well-documented analysis and conclusions are our own.

FRD is the organizational descendent of the Library’s former Aeronautics Division (today the Science, Technology, and Business Division). In 1948, in response to a request by the new Department of the Air Force for large amounts of information on the post-war world, the Aeronautics Division set up an Air Research Unit. This section grew in size and within the same year was reestablished as a separate division—the Air Studies Division. The new division’s primary mission was to exploit the large number of aeronautical journals, technical reports, and aviation-related documents and publications retrieved from war zones, particularly from Germany and Japan. Over time, Cold War planning required increased exploitation of research materials from and about the Eurasian communist nations and their allies in the developing world. Fortuitously, the exchange programs that the Library of Congress developed with the Soviet Union reaped major benefits to U.S. defense planners and technologists via our research. The exploitation and analysis of these unique Library collections had a significant national security value throughout the Cold War.

Indeed, the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency told a group of FRD managers toward the end of the Cold War period that FRD was “a national treasure” for what it had done to support the security of the United States.

There were several such defense-funded programs resident in the Library of Congress during the Cold War period. Changing requirements led to the rise and later abolition of several entities similar to the Air Studies Division. The division, which was renamed the Air Research Division and later the Defense Research Division (DRD), concentrated on the analytical side of research, producing studies and reports of critical need to defense planners. When the data-collecting and abstracting efforts of the other defense programs were no longer needed, DRD persevered as a research and analysis shop, priding itself on its ability to exploit foreign-language resources in the areas of both the physical sciences and the social sciences. By the time DRD became the Federal Research Division (FRD) in 1970, only one other defense program survived. That program was the Cold Regions Bibliography Project, sponsored by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and later cosponsored by the National Science Foundation. The project resided in the Science and Technology Division until 1998, when it was reassigned to FRD.

In the past 36 years, since we changed our name to Federal—in recognition of the Library’s decision that we should serve any Federal agency and in the face of periodic uncertain budgets—FRD has been reinvented several times. But the mission has remained the same: to exploit the collections of the Library of Congress and produce research, analysis, and translations for Federal agencies. And, in the contemporary era, that effort has expanded to include exploiting any open-source resource worldwide, whether via Web sites, commercial databases, fax, email, traditional mail, or personal visits, both domestic and foreign, by FRD staff.

In the 1970s and 1980s, FRD mostly continued to serve defense agencies. Some civilian agencies, such as the National Institutes of Health, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the Environmental Protection Agency, also made use of FRD services—almost exclusively in the foreign-language realm. An important feature of all of these programs was that if a needed publication was not in the Library’s collections, FRD would obtain it and, after exploiting the information on behalf of our clients, send it on to the Library’s acquisitions staff for processing as new items or for exchange and gift. This contribution amounted to upward of 5,000 new and duplicate titles a year during the Cold War.

The 1990s brought more change to FRD, followed by more reinvention. Once at a peak of 230 staff members, FRD shrank substantially in the post-Cold War period as the communist-related defense programs disappeared, the information age emerged, and, for a time, some agencies believed “everything they needed was on the Internet.” FRD was reduced eventually to only 15 staff members. Rising to this challenge, FRD replaced its few large defense sponsors with a mixture of numerous civilian and smaller defense agency clients. By FY 2005, FRD had worked for every cabinet-level department in the U.S. Government, plus many independent agencies, commissions, and obscure programs. Each year FRD works for 35 to 40 agencies and offices.

Two major growth areas have emerged in recent years. One has been writing organizational and legislative histories for Federal agencies; the other has been performing reverse translations. That is, FRD is engaged to translate materials from English into other languages. Most of this work is English-to-Spanish for the Census Bureau. However, we also have translated information from English into Albanian, Bulgarian, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian, Spanish, French, and Arabic for the Departments of Army, Commerce, Defense, Homeland Security, Labor, and Transportation. All of these documents were needed to communicate with foreign audiences in their own languages. Some involved FRD research and analysis, others just translation. In most cases, these efforts do not relate to acquisitions but are indicative of the need for foreign-language skills and resources within the Federal government.

While on the subject of foreign-language materials, I want to mention that The Librarian of Congress, James H. Billington, has observed that FRD is the largest user of the Library's foreign-language collections. This point is important because it begins to get to the heart of the information needs of policy makers in the government. All FRD research staff are required to be able to do research in one or more foreign languages. Sometimes this skill is used for translation from target languages into English, but it is mostly used for researching foreign-language materials in the same way that we research English-language information. Whether the published source is in Russian, Korean, Spanish, or Slovak, the information is accessible to our staff in the same way English is. When we were a larger division during the Cold War, FRD had some 45 foreign languages covered by its staff. Today that number is about 25, but through the use of other Library staff, who are cataloging materials or doing reference work in more than 400 languages, as well as outside contractors, FRD can accommodate all requests made of us. Asked before World War II if our foreign-language collections were used extensively, Librarian of Congress Herbert Putnam replied: "No. They are used *intensively*." This intense—and extensive—use has always been a hallmark of FRD and the area studies divisions.

I now will turn to some examples of projects done by FRD that are of value to the Federal policy-making community. Although we do not claim to always have a direct impact on policy makers, FRD reports are used for background, sometimes they are incorporated into larger reports, or their findings are extracted and used by those who do interact directly with the policy makers. Increasingly these days, I meet high-level officials of Federal agencies who say they are familiar with FRD studies. We also know that top policy makers read some FRD reports. A study I personally wrote in 1999 and updated in 2000 for an office under the Director of Central Intelligence on environmental issues in India was used by President Bill Clinton and a delegation that went to India in March 2000. Copies of FRD's Country Studies Series have accompanied several presidential and other delegations overseas. Although high-level delegations normally have classified briefings about their foreign destinations, FRD special country background reports, prepared exclusively from open sources, sometimes also have been given as handouts for nonofficial delegation members, such as spouses and members of the media. We have learned that our reports were well received by both official and nonofficial delegation members.

Sometimes information we have assembled, under tight deadlines and dependent on extensive use of Library materials, has been used by Federal agencies in preparing testimony before Congressional oversight committees. Such information has been used as background, sometimes for fact checking, sometimes for quotation. Members of Congress also occasionally request specific copies of FRD reports.

When U.S. forces were about to be deployed to Somalia in 1992, unclassified background information was largely outdated, and FRD's country study on Somalia was only in draft form. Initially we distributed a few draft copies to key defense offices, and then we worked with the Defense Intelligence Agency to produce a special prepublication edition of 500 copies that was distributed to operational units departing for Somalia, as well as to offices in headquarters of the armed services, the Department of Defense, Department of State, USAID, and others. Feedback from the troops was heartening. Personnel in the field reported that they found the draft study to be a "valuable and thorough reference tool" and one of the few things they had to read about Somalia on their way across the Atlantic.

In January 1996, FRD was given a "drop-everything" project by the National Intelligence Council to help them develop ways of measuring human suffering in 24 nations that faced devastating circumstances caused by natural disasters, wars, revolutions, and government failure. The U.S. Mission to the United Nations used the data we produced in less than two weeks to develop a statistical matrix for their report entitled "Global Humanitarian Emergencies, 1996."

Of more critical urgency was a life-saving mission. Once, in the early 1980s, a typhoon was heading toward a remote Pacific island. It promised to be devastating. Efforts by the U.S. Department of Defense to alert the authorities on this island had failed. FRD, which had an in-depth research program on foreign telecommunications capabilities, was asked on an urgent basis to provide information on the type of communication equipment available on the island. The answer was quickly given, island authorities were informed via the correct radio channel, and they were able to secure themselves before the onslaught of the typhoon.

Once, in the early 1990s, representatives of a law enforcement agency showed up on our doorstep. They needed the French version of an article on stealth technology. They said they would wait. We found it and provided copies in less than an hour (and we were located in the Navy Annex in those days). Later that day, using our find as evidence, an arrest was made in an espionage case.

In another case, an FRD study made prognostications that had reverberations in the White House several years later. In September 1999, FRD submitted a report commissioned by the National Intelligence Council on the psychological and sociological reasons individuals become terrorists. The report reviewed state-of-the-art terrorism literature and covered such diverse topics as the process of joining terrorist groups, terrorists' rationalization of violence, the marital status of terrorists, and even the practicality of using female suicide bombers. The author also engaged in a bit of speculation based on his years of research and practical knowledge. In an introductory section

on new terrorist threat scenarios, he wrote that “[s]uicide bomber(s) belonging to al-Qaeda’s Martyrdom Battalion could crash-land an aircraft packed with high explosives into the Pentagon, the headquarters of the Central Intelligence Agency, or the White House.” This 9/11 scenario was wrong only in regard to the need for high explosives. The FRD report became a topic of intense discussion at a White House press conference in May 2002, at a time when the president and his national security advisor had been saying that no one had any idea that 9/11 could have happened. Obviously there were those in the press and other circles who believed FRD had been strikingly prescient.

Since 9/11, a considerable amount of FRD work has been devoted to research on the nexus of terrorists, drug traffickers, and organized crime groups, both international and regional. Using literature from around the world, FRD analysts have written numerous studies in support of national security planners and operational commanders who need a better understanding of the enemy they face. We knew we were on the mark with one study that was posted on our Web site because of the minor furor it caused. Our study reviewed the laws, societal norms, history, and other features of numerous nations and posited which ones were potentially hospitable to transnational organized criminal and terrorist activities. These nations were not just those assumed to be friendly to organized crime elements and terrorists—the so-called patron states—but also included the liberal democracies that willingly allow freedom of movement, assembly, and other basic rights. Among those nations is Canada, and, when put on notice by the local media, Ottawa took exception to the FRD report and filed a diplomatic protest with the Librarian of Congress. Although I think we successfully explained ourselves and promised always to consult with the political section at the Canadian Embassy (which we had done, by the way, during the research phase), we were exonerated several weeks later when a report prepared by the Canadian Senate came to essentially the same conclusion as the FRD report with regard to the unintended hospitality offered by our neighbor to the north.

I want to offer just a few more examples of FRD work before moving on to my recommendations. These examples will illustrate that FRD does not perform solely national security work but also work done on international topics of interest to various Federal agencies. We have been involved recently in collecting gray literature on human trafficking and writing analytical reports on alien smuggling and women in Muslim societies, all three of which are areas of interest to various Federal agencies. Other topics include work done on the Mexican housing industry, current trends in Russian housing policy, housing and urban development in Canada and Britain, the flight of the American motion picture and television film industry to foreign locales, the 50-year history of U.S. PL-480 foreign agricultural loans, and recommendations for reference works for the parliamentary library of East Timor. We also have been involved in research on the capabilities and objectives of foreign space programs; foreign spending on nanotechnology R&D; worldwide government investment in fuel cell R&D; and the central organization in China responsible for the supervision, inspection, and quarantine of animals. I am sorry that our research on rats, mice, and birds was a domestic (U.S.) topic, or I would tell you about how that work led to a significant regulatory decision by the Secretary of Agriculture.

I want to turn now to some recommendations. First I want to emphasize again the importance of using foreign-language materials. Collecting this information and making it available is absolutely critical. But if no one asks the questions that lead to the exploitation of this material and the right linguists are not available to read it when it is needed, the acquisition effort will not be immediately recognized. In my liaison work with Federal agencies interested in international topics, I always emphasize the importance of looking at foreign-language literature. Analysts of a well-known agency told me a few years ago that they had written a definitive study on a particular subject but that it was based almost exclusively on English-language sources. That comment was all the entrée I needed. They had not tapped the indigenous languages of the region. Using just one in-house linguist, who happened to be fluent in an impressive array of languages, we were able to inform our client of many additional viewpoints on their subject. So impressed were the recipients of our report that they ordered a second and related study to develop economic, demographic, sociological, religious, and other statistical baselines from foreign sources. My recommendation is simple—continue to aggressively seek all forms of foreign-language information.

My second point is alluded to in the first. The string of topics mentioned—economic, demographic, sociological, religious—added to those dealing with history, law, science and technology, national security, terrorism, and other transnational issues of critical importance can be summarized in two words: multidisciplinary research. Although the members of my staff were originally trained and have advanced degrees in specific academic disciplines, they all, in a sense, have become generalists. Maybe a better term for them is multidisciplinarians. Whatever the term, projects are assigned based on language skills and general research capabilities. Writing and analytical skills and area specialization of higher-level staff also come into play. What is important to understand is that area studies work done in FRD, as well as in many other Federal agencies, the military, and private companies with international markets, goes well beyond the traditional cultural or sociological approach to understanding foreign nations and regions. International collection development must take place across a broad range of disciplines.

Third, in order to perform multidisciplinary research, we need a wide range of content and formats. In my own time at the Library of Congress, I have had occasion to use every reading room—their resources and staff expertise—within the Library in the course of doing various FRD projects. These reading rooms include the obvious ones, such as the Main Reading Room, Science and Business, Serial and Government Publications, Geography and Map, Law, and the area studies reading rooms. But I have also referred to Prints and Photographs, Manuscript, Music, Motion Picture, and American Folklife reading rooms, and even the Children’s Literature Center. Looked at another way, monographs, journals, technical reports, newspapers, video clips, maps, and even children’s story books all have value and all have some information relevant to foreign area research.

Gray literature—or more correctly now called gray information, meaning research reports or ephemera in any format, such as government agency monographs, symposium proceedings, and unpublished company reports—has traditionally been a fruitful feeding ground for FRD analysts. Known as ephemera to some, gray information, if obtained on a timely basis, can be extremely

valuable to the research process. One of the reasons FRD was a highly valued asset during the Cold War was its exploitation of gray literature from the Soviet Union. Soviet institutes were so generous with their preprints, conference proceedings, limited-distribution research papers, and other materials that FRD technologists kept abreast of advanced developments in Soviet R&D with military applications when they were still in the conceptual stage. Imagine what U.S. planners thought of FRD findings that Soviet engineers were studying dolphins and sailfish that secrete a substance that propels them more smoothly and quickly through the water and how a similar flexible skin could be applied to the outside of the Soviet navy's submarines. In another case, American specialists witnessed demonstrated Soviet competence in artificial intelligence and computing but could not comprehend how the success was achieved using, in American terms, "such primitive hardware." An FRD researcher investigated Soviet programming and software capabilities to demonstrate how mathematical and software talent compensated for primitive hardware. Today FRD has become a lead agency in identifying and processing data from gray information on trafficking of women and children across international borders and on other topics. My third recommendation—never underestimate the current or future value of even seemingly arcane information, and always pay attention to what the research community is asking for.