

# Assessing Violence Risk in Threatening Communications

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# FBI Behavioral Analysis Units:

BAU-1: Terrorism

BAU-2: Threat Assessment

Cyber

BAU-3: Crimes Against Children

BAU-4: Crimes Against Adults

BAU-5: Research, Training & Special Projects



# FBI Behavioral Analysis Units:

BAU-2: Threat Assessment, The Behavioral Threat Assessment Center

- Yes: Active shooters, mass attacks, school/workplace/public venue attacks, stalking, extortion, threatening communications, active crises such as hostage-barricade standoffs.
- No: Serial killers, serial rape.



# Overarching philosophy:

All communicated threats should be carefully assessed and treated seriously.



# Today's presentation

- Accept or not accept the case?
- Triage
- Assessment
- Logistics



- BAU case acceptance policy
  - Triage indicates moderate or higher level of concern, or
  - Part of a larger, high priority investigation, or
  - Particularly complex or unusual case warranting specialized resource of the BAU
- Before we engage, we require either:
  - Some basic investigation has been completed, or
  - Triage indicates high concern



- First, has basic investigation been done?
   Traditional investigation is valuable and should not be skipped.
- If a case is submitted before any investigation has been conducted, consider whether it is ready for threat assessment
  - Resource allocation
  - Sufficient information



- Communicated threat assessment is grounded in <u>both</u>:
  - assessment of the communication (content), and
  - ambient facts (conditions).
- Give any received threatening or menacing communication serious attention until an objective assessment suggests doing otherwise.



- Threatening or menacing communications should be taken seriously unless:
  - the author is immediately known, and
  - known to lack actual capacity to do harm.

Usually, this will not be the case.



Communication

**Anonymous** 

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Assess communication

 $\downarrow$ 

**Known Author** 

 $\downarrow$ 

Assess person of concern, including communication



#### **TRIAGE**

- Dual purpose:
  - Prioritize
  - Acquire more information
- Triage is an initial, brief assessment
- Both traditional investigative and threat assessment techniques may be used



# TRIAGE QUESTIONS

- 1. Is there an <u>urgent</u> need for threat assessment based upon brief review of content and conditions of the communication?
- 2. What are the needed investigative steps?



#### **PROCESS**

- Case is assigned to a "lead" BAU profiler
- Lead profiler reviews the communication and conducts the triage
- Lead profiler either [a] convenes a team to assess it urgently, or [b] responds to the customer with a series of questions or requests for additional information



- Assessment of a communication attempts to answer several questions, including but not limited to:
  - Who is the threatener (if unknown)?
  - Does the threatener intend violence?
  - Is the threatener able to engage in violence?
  - Will the threatener keep threatening?
  - What steps are necessary to keep the target and public safe?



- Players
- Methods
- History
- Content
- Context
- Motive



- Players
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#### Assessment – PLAYERS

- Who is the threatener?
- Who are the target(s)?
- Relationship between threatener and target(s)?
- Who else is referenced and how do they fit in?



#### Assessment – THREATENER

- Criminally sophisticated or novice
  - Feasibility of plan
  - Bona fides
- Linguistic Assessment
  - First or second language
  - Education, age, gender
  - Single or plural authorship



#### Assessment – THREATENER

Feasible plan?

"I am going to rape and kill 44 female students on this campus!!" "I will rape 200 females!" "We have placed pressure cooker bombs in 20 lockers at the school. You'll never find them in time."



#### Assessment – THREATENER

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#### Assessment – THREATENER

- Beware of "contra-indicators"
  - Usually appear in the first few lines or toward the end.
    - False biographical detail
    - Deliberate spelling or grammar errors
    - Compensatory "we"



"I am back. All of the threats you received before were tests. I have been on this earth for over 40 years and I know what I am doing. It is now time. I have a Russian Team of 30 men coming to your school and we have a van fitted with explosives including C4s. My Russian Team of 30 men will come inside to kill everyone after the van is rammed into the building. Signed: Nikolai."



#### Assessment – THREATENER

- Gender?
  - The overwhelming majority are male.
  - Empirical data do not yet support connecting language choice to gender identification in the genre of threatening communications.
  - In linguistic analysis, genre matters.

 Beware of feminine gender identification or performance, or simply heavy exposure.



#### Assessment – THREATENER

- "Precision can be the enemy of accuracy."
  - (Don't overdo it.)



#### Assessment – THREATENER

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#### Assessment – THREATENER

- Narcissistic, paranoid, angry
- Meticulous or sloppy
- Style of communication: business, text message "speak," handwriting

-- These may also be observable by those around an offender



#### Assessment – TARGET

- One person or a wide range of people
  - Is the threatener focused on 1 person or class of persons or 1 organization? or
  - Is he unfocused, threatening multiple, unrelated targets?
- Type of target
  - Public figure or private
  - Intimate partner, coworker or fellow student



#### Assessment – TARGET

- Vulnerability and availability
- Does the target have any suspects?

• Should self-victimization be considered (rare)?



- Players
- Methods
- History
- Content
- Context
- Motive



#### Assessment - METHODS

- Delivery
  - Low or high risk
  - Multiple methods
- Demonstrated ability to avoid security measures



#### Assessment – METHODS

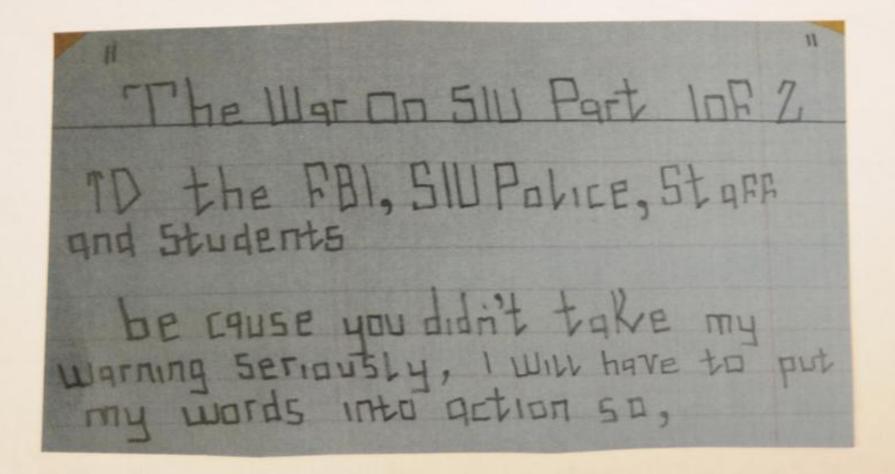
- Delivery
  - High risk: A threat letter left on the target's front door step during the dinner hour.
  - Low risk: Anonymized email server.



#### Assessment – METHODS

- Linguistic staging
  - Conceal identity
    - Handwriting, spelling, word choices, language
    - Technical means (e.g., email anonymizer)
    - False biographical detail
  - Amplification of numbers







- Players
- Methods
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#### Assessment - HISTORY

- Single incident versus part of a series
- Increase in frequency or rhetoric over multiple communications
- Significant events or anniversaries near the time of communication
- Any recent events mentioned



## Assessment - HISTORY

- Threatening Communication Database (TCD).
   Jointly held with the FBI Laboratory.
  - Over 7,500 criminally-oriented communications, including 16,000+ images
  - Mostly written communications (hand-written, typed, computer-generated, emails)
  - Some transcriptions of verbal (in-person, prerecorded, or telephonic) threats and communications



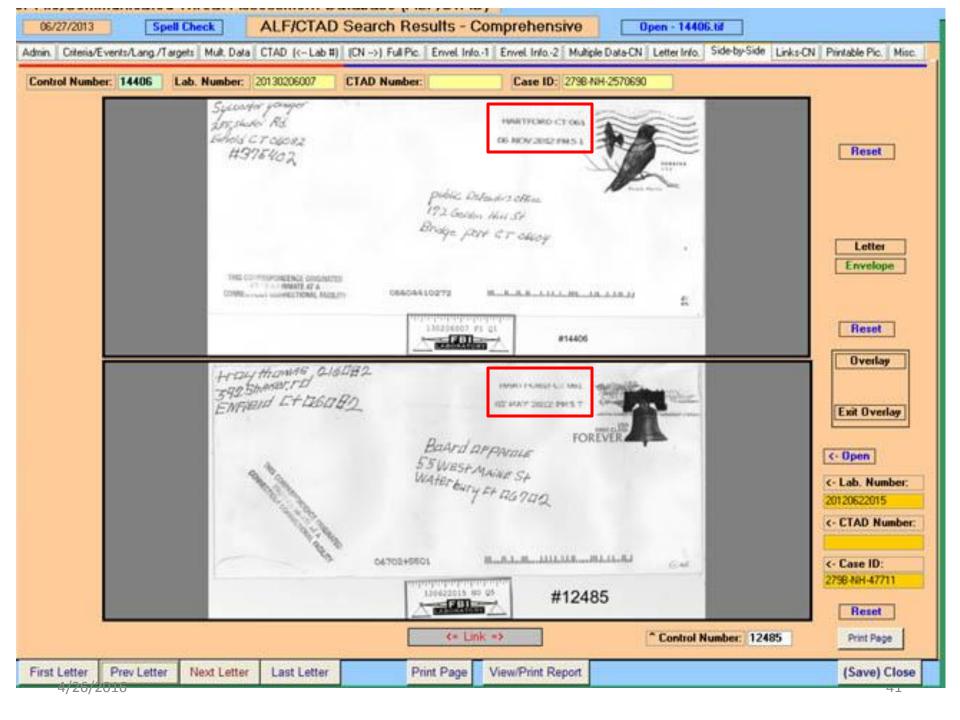
#### Assessment - HISTORY

- Threatening Communication Database.
  - Focus on behavioral aspects of a communication
  - One goal of the Threatening Communication
     Database is to identify communications potentially authored by the same individual.
  - Another goal is to exploit physical or evidentiary aspects (FBI Lab).

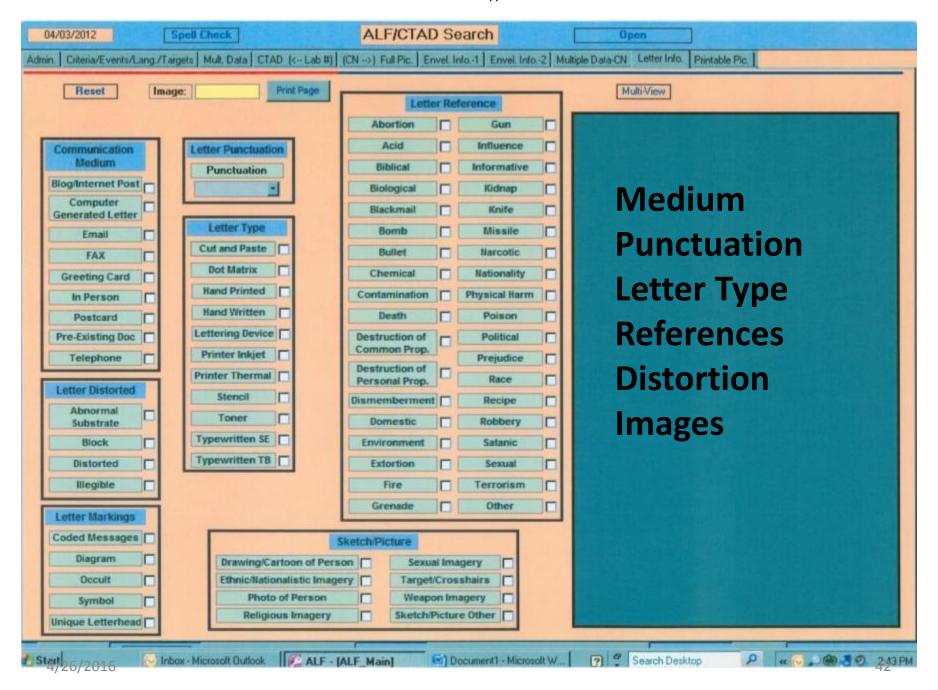
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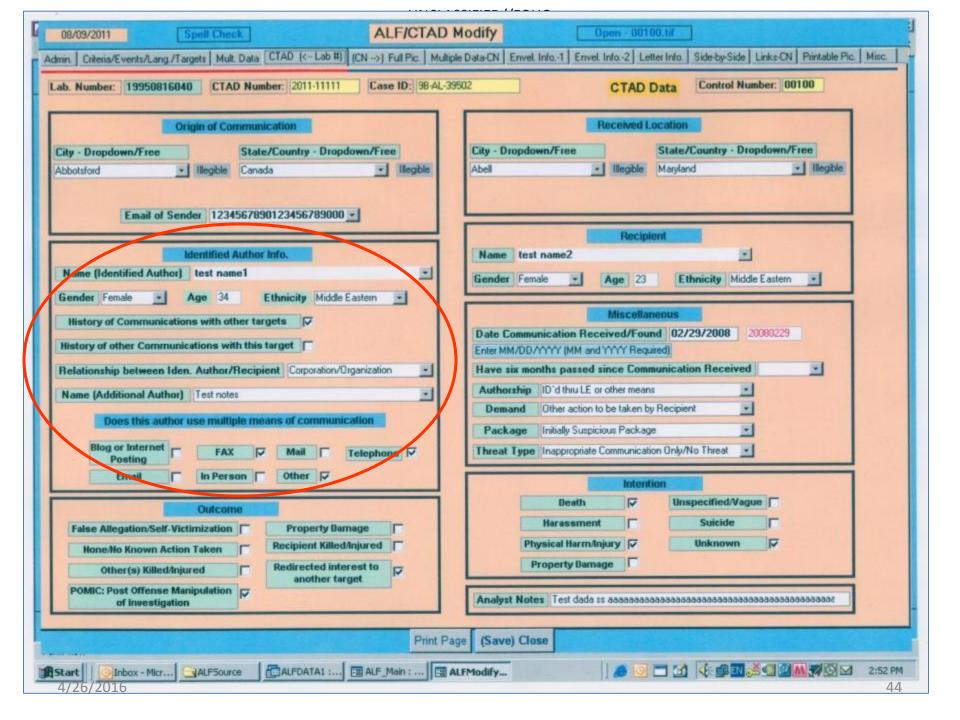
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### Assessment - HISTORY

- Threatening Communication Database.
  - In addition to matching communications and authors, BAU hopes the database will assist in identifying patterns and trends in threatening communications and their authors.





## **ASSESSMENT**

- Players
- Methods
- History
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- Motive



#### Assessment – CONTENT

- Primary direction of interest
  - Violent or nonviolent
  - If nonviolent, assessment process may end
- When will violence occur?
- Is the plan feasible?
- Who could benefit?



#### Assessment - CONTENT

- Verbal expressions of:
  - Risk factors
  - -"Warning Behaviors"
  - Stressors and precipitating events
  - Mitigators.



#### Assessment - CONTENT

- Personal grievance
- Rationalization of action (violence) and justification of result (death, injury)
- Suicidality and/or end of life planning
- Willing to behave recklessly, as if consequences do not matter



#### Assessment – CONTENT

- Specific and credible detail about weapons or devices ("bona fides")
- Previous violence or approach to Target, or request/desire for a face-to-face meeting
- "Eyes-on" surveillance of Target
- Private or difficult to discover information about Target



#### Assessment – CONTENT

Lim marked for death but instead of hiding like a coward. I continuously raise awareness about the real problem of why I'm marked for death!



#### Assessment – CONTENT

Writing my horrific experiences before #AaronAlexis, #MiriamCarey, #SusanWatkins, #MyronMay, #StevenBradley is an indication of a sad future



#### Assessment – CONTENT

(Name and Twitter handle of writer)
Susan Watkins committed suicide in March of 2014 and left a message, "They watched me by satellite while I killed myself" #Ti



#### Assessment – CONTENT

If I die in this moment, I can honestly say I've lived to the best of my ability being a victim of mind invasive Directed Energy attacks!



#### Assessment – CONTENT

(Name and Twitter handle of writer)

#AaronAlexis #MyronMay Suicide notes mirror my 30 years of personal experiences self-published 8/13/2013 of being a VICTIM of DEW Terrorism



## **ASSESSMENT**

- Players
- Methods
- History
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- Motive



### Assessment - CONTEXT

- What is the significance of any dates or places named in the communication?
- What is happening in the target's life now?
- What is happening in the world now?
- If the threatener is known, has there also been leakage?



# CONTEXT

I kill for satisfaction Assessment - I kill him and her I don't care thier Blood will Become wine. Flesh into deligntful meat. Likethe taste of a dog on a street.

> Blood will pour from thier tormented bodies. Cries of punishment not foolishment. Their Torso will break. They will scream for mercy. AND they will die!!!

This is no lie. For the scream and cry.



## **ASSESSMENT**

- Players
- Methods
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#### Assessment – MOTIVE

- Why send this communication at this time, to this person?
- Where is the threatener's commitment- doing harm or something else?
- Intention and commitment may not coincide (for example, a desire to become famous may not be accompanied by commitment to do what is necessary to achieve fame).



#### Assessment – <u>SOME</u> MOTIVES

- Functional (to achieve something)
  - Get something of value
  - Create or modify behavior in others
  - Generate attention for oneself or a cause
  - Maintain or achieve a change in status
  - Establish dominance over another
  - Protect oneself
  - Signal future action by the threatener, including violence
- Emotional (to feel something)
  - Feel satisfaction or enjoyment (retaliation, causing fear or anxiety, engaging in shocking behavior, watching reaction)
  - Relieve stress



## **ASSESSMENT**

- Players
- Methods
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### **PROCESS**

How do we work?

- The assessment process is usually the same.
- The management process (when needed) is always unique.



#### PROCESS - LEAD PROFILER

- Case is assigned to a "lead" BAU profiler.
- Lead profiler reviews the communication and conducts the triage.
- Lead profiler either [a] convenes a team to assess it urgently, or [b] responds to the client with a series of questions or requests for additional information.



#### **PROCESS - TEAM**

- Each team has at least two profilers and one analyst (often more).
- We work best in consultation with each other; no profiler may work a case alone except in an emergency.
- Before meeting, team members:
  - Review all information
  - Identify unanswered questions
  - Form preliminary opinions



#### PROCESS- AVOIDING BIAS

- Avoid "group think."
  - Distribute communication and case information to team members in advance. Members bring their observations to the meeting and share.
  - For anonymous threats, a lone assessor can be used, who assesses the communication / receives no other information. Not always suitable.
  - Differences of opinion are encouraged.



#### PROCESS- TEAM MEETING

- The team meets. At the meeting:
  - Unanswered questions are identified
  - Each team member reveals and justifies opinions;
     lone assessor (if there was one) reveals opinions
  - Consensus is reached when possible regarding profile.



#### PROCESS- TEAM MEETING

- Profile includes
  - Level of concern for violence/what kind of violence
  - Imminence
  - Unknown offender profile
  - Motive
  - Evidence of staging and, more importantly, what it means for investigators
  - Mitigation strategies if possible and needed



#### PROCESS – TEAM MEETING

- The team meets. At the meeting:
  - If consensus is not reached (rare), differing opinions may be offered as alternative possibilities.
  - Management techniques are limited only by the law and our imagination



#### **PROCESS - CONSULTATION**

- The team participates in a scheduled telephone conference with client:
  - Caveats and limitations are explained
  - Unanswered questions are posed and answered
  - Team takes a break if necessary to refine assessment
  - Team discusses assessment with customer and answers any questions
  - Lead profiler writes and delivers written report



### **PROCESS - REPORT**

- Lead profiler writes and delivers written report
  - Draft undergoes peer review, then unit chief review and final approval



#### **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

## FBI Behavioral Threat Assessment Center FBI Behavioral Analysis Unit 1993-Present

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