



Primer: Break the Iron Triangle of FBI Weaponization

by Stephen Friend

In American politics, an “iron triangle” describes mutually supportive relationships between bureaucratic agencies, special interest groups, and legislative committees with dominion over particular areas within the government. These actors hang together to thwart outside reformers seeking to alter established policies. These triangles ultimately exist to retain power and promote their members’ predilections irrespective of impact on the general welfare.

In recent years, the nation has witnessed brazen corruption and politicization of its premier law enforcement agency, culminating in a two-tiered system of justice prejudiced against conservative Americans. The driving forces behind present and ongoing FBI malfeasance can be described as an iron triangle of agency weaponization.

Whereas the traditional iron triangle unites constituencies from apparently disparate fields, the iron triangle of FBI weaponization is constructed by influences and incentives already prevalent within the agency. These forces include: prioritization of domestic intelligence collection, bureaucratic capture manifesting as mission creep and quota systems, and anti-conservative and anti-Christian ideological biases.

Prioritization of Domestic Intelligence Collection

Prioritization of domestic intelligence collection has reoriented FBI resources to spy on American citizens rather than investigate violations of federal law. The FBI’s Intelligence Branch was established as an independent department within the bureau by former FBI Director James Comey in 2014. The Intelligence Branch claims the information it gathers and shares guides its mission to protect the American people and uphold the Constitution. Whereas earlier foreign counterintelligence iterations of FBI intelligence work focused on espionage, counterproliferation, and illicit finance from nefarious foreign actors, the new Intelligence Branch increasingly dictates operations for the bureau, turning the FBI into a domestic intelligence agency with a law enforcement capability.

Law enforcement investigations are linear: an alleged crime occurs, investigators gather facts and evidence, and the offender is prosecuted. Intelligence investigations, by contrast, are circular; for intelligence investigations, success rests in continuation, rather than completion. These cases are solely intended to gather information. Moreover, as more intelligence is gleaned, investigators learn the identities of people tangentially connected with their subject and can initiate additional intelligence investigations of those individuals.

Once opened, FBI intelligence investigations are an official government process. Any acts deemed to interfere with the proceeding may violate federal law. In recent years, the FBI has abused prosecution of process crimes connected to intelligence investigations to target its perceived political enemies.

For example, in 2017, Director Comey deployed special agents to meet and interview National Security Advisor General Mike Flynn in connection with the now-debunked Russian election interference hoax. After the meeting, the FBI launched a full investigation of Flynn for making false statements. In a revelatory hand-written note regarding the Flynn investigation, former FBI Counterintelligence Director Bill Priestap penned, “What’s our goal? Truth/Admission or to get him to lie, so we can prosecute him or get him fired?”

The FBI’s Intelligence Branch partners with other government agencies, private sector institutions, and academic communities to further its intelligence-gathering aims and circumvent privacy protections under the guise of “national security.” These dubious partnerships facilitate censorship of protected speech and illegal searches of private information.

The FBI’s Domestic Investigation and Operations Guide Appendix G authorizes the agency to open full counterintelligence investigations if the bureau can articulate that the subject of the investigation was or could be targeted for recruitment by a foreign power. This is overly broad and ends in unjustifiable counterintelligence investigation that artificially boost the FBI’s counterintelligence statistics.

Bureaucratic Capture, Mission Creep, and Quota Systems

Bureaucratic capture, mission creep, and quota systems are creating a perverse incentive structure for the FBI to artificially boost crime and terrorism statistics. The FBI uses arbitrary performance metrics that create incentives for the weaponization of FBI resources. The FBI created the Integrated Program Management system approximately ten years ago to prioritize threats, allocate resources, and measure performance. The field offices and Senior Executive Service leaders are rated and receive bonus compensation based on the system’s predetermined metrics.

The Integrated Program Management evaluation system is a year-long cycle, which requires significant time investment from large swaths of FBI personnel and incentivizes the use of inappropriate investigatory processes or tools to achieve arbitrary statistical accomplishments. The Integrated Program Management’s performance metrics essentially mandate a minimum number of intelligence products authored during the fiscal year, new cases opened for each criminal or national security program, arrest quotas, surveillance operations, search warrant operations, polygraph examinations, National Security Letters, subpoena issuances, and subject interviews. Accordingly, quantity versus quality of casework or investigations is often emphasized.

The FBI established the National Security Branch, the original home of the Intelligence Branch division, in September 2005, as part of its mission to detect, deter, and disrupt national security

threats in the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The branch collects, analyzes, and shares intelligence to understand and defeat these threats while preserving civil liberties. Unfortunately, bureaucratic mission creep and arbitrary performance metrics lead the FBI's National Security Branch to unjustifiably target groups of Americans disfavored by the regime.

In order to continue to justify its outsized budget and power, the FBI has increased its focus on “homegrown violent extremists” (HVEs). The FBI defines HVEs as persons who live and operate primarily in the US while advocating or engaging in ideologically motivated terrorist activities in furtherance of objectives promoted by foreign terrorist organizations. The FBI is incentivized by the Integrated Program Management system to target and ensnare Americans in the counterterrorism dragnet. For example, in the years after 9/11, Muslim Americans were routinely targeted for entrapment by the FBI as part of its focus on HVEs.

In recent years, the FBI's counterterrorism mission shifted from homegrown violent extremism to “domestic violent extremists” (DVEs). The FBI characterizes DVEs as seeking to further political or social goals through unlawful acts of force or violence. Although the FBI publicly states that mere advocacy of political positions, activism, use of strong rhetoric, or even general philosophic embrace of violent tactics may be constitutionally protected, agency operations indicate otherwise. For example, the FBI spied on private Facebook messages without court authorized subpoenas and search warrants via Operation Bronze Griffon.¹

In 2020, the bureau employed informants and undercover agents to infiltrate an online group called the Wolverine Watchmen. The FBI provided training, equipment, and transportation resources to entrap the group in a conspiracy to kidnap the Michigan governor. The FBI National Security Branch also departed from investigative rules for January 6-related cases and created a false statistical narrative to support the argument that domestic terrorism is a rising, nationwide threat. Unsurprisingly, after President Biden's remarks about “extreme MAGA Republicans” in September 2022 characterized GOP voters and elected officials as anti-government, racial extremists, the FBI National Security Branch lists “anti-government” and “racially motivated extremism” as two of its top four threat priorities.

Anti-Conservative, Anti-Christian Ideological Biases

Anti-conservative, anti-christian ideological biases have motivated the FBI to target Americans for First Amendment-protected activities. A recent whistleblower disclosure revealed that an FBI intelligence report about “Radical Traditional Catholics” relied on information from left-leaning political entities like the Southern Poverty Law Center, Salon.com, and the *Atlantic*. There were no counterbalancing sources, and it would appear the report was a political grievance list used to create the predicate for a national security investigation of lawful First Amendment-protected activity. In this case, the report author identified pro-life, pro-traditional marriage, and pro-border protection policy preferences as an ideological gateway to radicalization against the government.

¹ Steven Nelson. “Operation Bronze Griffin’: House GOP report says Facebook giving FBI ‘partisan’ tips.” *New York Post*, Nov. 4, 2022.

<https://nypost.com/2022/11/04/operation-bronze-griffin-house-gop-report-says-facebook-giving-fbi-partisan-tips/>.

In October 2023, *Newsweek* spotlighted the FBI's latest label: "antigovernment antiauthority violent extremism."² The FBI defines this threat to encompass "the potentially unlawful use or threat of force or violence in furtherance of ideological agendas derived from antigovernment or antiauthority sentiment, including opposition to perceived economic, social, or racial hierarchies, or perceived government overreach, negligence, or illegitimacy." In a joint report to Congress, the FBI and Department of Homeland Security concluded that "narratives of fraud in the recent general election, the emboldening impact of the violent breach of the U.S. Capitol, conditions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and conspiracy theories promoting violence will almost certainly spur some domestic terrorist to try and engage in violence. The *Newsweek* article rightly characterized the listed threats as commonly attributable to American conservatives and supporters of former President Donald Trump.

Following the Supreme Court's ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, the FBI selectively targeted prolife activists and protestors for violations of the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act. When local and state authorities declined to prosecute Mark Houck for his involvement in an altercation outside an abortion clinic in Philadelphia, the FBI cynically investigated and obtained an arrest warrant for Houck. Despite Houck's pledge to peacefully surrender, the FBI deployed a dozen armed agents to arrest him in September 2022. While the FACE Act prohibits obstruction of Americans' First Amendment right of religious freedom as well as damage and destruction to places of worship, the FBI has chosen not to criminal prosecute individuals for acts of vandalism and destruction of churches and faith-based crisis pregnancy centers.

According to government whistleblowers and recent reports, the FBI explicitly elected to abandon child pornography investigations and focus on the January 6th investigation.³ For one particular investigation, the FBI resumed the investigation several years later only to discover the subject had performed sex acts on a ten-year-old child in the intervening time. Nevertheless, FBI Director Christopher Wray falsely testified before the House Judiciary Committee in July 2023 that no FBI agents were reassigned from child exploitation investigations to investigate January 6th. Thus far, the FBI has not revealed how many other criminal investigations were halted to pursue January 6th cases.

The FBI's prejudices extend to its conservative and Christian employees. Whistleblower disclosures to the House Judiciary Committee reported that FBI executives inside the bureau's Security Division recruited 100 to 300 temporary employees from field offices to conduct security clearance investigations "against whistleblowers, conservatives, and employees with an

² William M. Arkin. "Exclusive: Donald Trump Followers Targeted by FBI as 2024 Election Nears." *News Week*, Oct. 4, 2023. <https://www.newsweek.com/2023/10/13/exclusive-fbi-targets-trump-followers-as-2024-election-nears-1831836.html>.

³ Luke Rosiak. "The FBI Halted Probe Of Pedophile To Focus On January 6. Now He's Accused Of Abusing A 10-Year-Old Boy." *The Daily Wire*, Nov. 17, 2023. <https://www.dailywire.com/news/the-fbi-dropped-probe-of-pedophile-to-focus-on-january-6-now-hes-accused-of-abusing-10-year-old-boy>.

unacceptable political affiliation or belief.”⁴ Other whistleblowers informed Congress that high-ranking FBI officials accused employees who are military veterans of disloyalty to the country because “they fit the profile of a supporter of former President Donald Trump.”⁵ FBI executives identified failure to wear a face mask, refusing to take the COVID-19 vaccination, and participating in religious activities as other signs that an employee was a “right wing radical and disloyal to the United States.”

The FBI has installed political activists to senior executive service positions across the country. In June 2023, a whistleblower notified Congress and the Department of Justice that FBI Deputy Director Paul Abbate threatened the jobs of agency employees concerned about the bureau’s overblown response in January 6th investigations.⁶ A whistleblower disclosure from November 2023 detailed how current Miami Field Office Special Agent in Charge Jeffrey Veltri was ordered to “scrub his Facebook page to delete anti-Trump vitriol” before his promotion to the post. Veltri’s political biases were known to Director Wray, Deputy Director Abbate, and Executive Assistant Director Jennifer Moore; the three wanted to ensure he appeared non-political.⁷ Veltri served as acting deputy assistant director of the FBI’s Security Division prior to ascending to the post in Miami and oversaw efforts to suspend agents’ security clearances if they were believed to hold conservative political beliefs.

Reforms to Break the FBI’s Iron Triangle of Weaponization

The FBI is presently a weaponized arm of the political left. Without vital reform, America will witness the agency continue to target conservative Americans and trample constitutional rights. Congress must use its power to end these abuses and fundamentally transform the FBI in a way that ensures it prioritizes working for the American people as opposed to against them.

The appropriate reforms include:

⁴ Kerry Picket. “Whistleblowers accuse senior FBI officials of retaliating against agents for their political beliefs.” *The Washington Times*, Nov. 7, 2023.

https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/nov/7/whistleblowers-accuse-senior-fbi-officials-retalia/?utm_campaign=shareaholic&utm_medium=twitter&utm_source=socialnetwork.

⁵ Kerry Picket. “FBI accused of targeting Trump types; agents who served in military deemed ‘disloyal’.” *The Washington Times*, Nov. 10, 2023.

https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/nov/10/whistleblowers-fbi-officials-singled-out-agents-wh/?utm_campaign=shareaholic&utm_medium=twitter&utm_source=socialnetwork.

⁶ “Empower Oversight Delivers Evidence of FBI Deputy Director Threatening January 6th FBI Whistleblowers.” Empower.us. Empower Oversight: Whistleblowers & Research, June 22, 2023.

<https://empowr.us/empower-oversight-delivers-evidence-of-fbi-deputy-director-threatening-january-6th-fbi-whistleblowers/>.

⁷ Kerry Picket. “FBI agent had to erase public vitriol on Trump; Mar-a-Lago in field office’s jurisdiction.” *The Washington Times*, Nov. 20, 2023.

<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/nov/20/whistleblower-fbi-official-ordered-to-scrub-anti-t/>.

Defund the FBI Intelligence Branch and refocus the agency toward traditional law enforcement matters. The counterintelligence investigations that should concern the FBI are those pertaining to espionage, counterproliferation, and foreign illicit finance, among other related issues.

End Integrated Program Management. Wedding arbitrary metrics to compensation for leaders creates a perverse incentive structure in which FBI senior executives financially profit by pressuring rank-in-file personnel to prioritize case quantity ahead of quality and integrity. Moreover, the financial incentives are derogatory, exculpatory material that was never furnished to criminal defendants. This is potential *Giglio* material that may jeopardize righteous prosecutions.

Remove Domestic Investigations and Operations Guide (DIOG) Appendix G. Suspicion that a subject was or could be targeted for recruitment by a foreign power is overly broad as a basis for authorizing full counterintelligence investigations. The invocation of Appendix G results too often in unjustifiable counterintelligence investigations, which inflate the FBI's counterintelligence statistics.

Disallow Type 5 Assessments. FBI special agents are authorized to investigate people in the United States who are not suspected of having committed crimes but who, in special agents' opinions, could be recruited as confidential human sources (CHS). Before approaching the potential CHS, special agents build a case file including derogatory information and material that may prove useful in coercing cooperation. Special agents may use undercover identities to recruit CHS. With appropriate approval, the pool of potential CHS includes minors, clergy, lawyers, and journalists. CHS can operate in foreign countries without notifying the host nation.

Stop FBI Headquarters Temporary Duty Opportunities. FBI personnel entering management receive preferential treatment if they elect for an 18-month temporary duty (TDY) assignment at FBI Headquarters. These are "Program Manager" positions and are the gateway to becoming a permanent Supervisory Special Agent (GS-14). The TDY agents are afforded costly per diem and housing allowance in Washington, D.C., throughout their time working at FBI Headquarters. This results in constant turnover in Program Manager positions responsible for overseeing funds and coordinating operations for the various FBI criminal and national security initiatives. TDY agents commonly assume oversight positions for violations in which they have no investigative experience. Program Manager positions should be permanent change of duty stations which need not exist at FBI Headquarters.

Disarm the FBI and establish the agency as an unarmed bureau of investigations. The remade FBI should partner with local law enforcement agencies to conduct investigations into potential violations of federal law.⁸

⁸ Stephen Friend. "It's Time To Disarm All FBI Agents And Return Authority To Local Law Enforcement." The Federalist, July 26, 2023.

Conclusion

Prioritization of domestic intelligence collection, bureaucratic capture, and anti-conservative and anti-Christian biases are driving the FBI's present weaponization against the American people. Without significant reforms, the nation will continue to witness this agency unconstitutionally target citizens and trample constitutional rights. Congress must energetically confront each segment of the FBI's iron triangle to end these abuses and refocus the agency to uphold the rule of law, defend the Constitution, and ensure due process and justice for all Americans.