

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

# FEDERAL RESEARCH DIVISION

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## Updated History of the Federal Research Division

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Editor



## Introduction

The Federal Research Division (FRD) within the Library of Congress provides directed research, analysis, and translation services on domestic and international subjects to agencies of the U.S. government, the District of Columbia, and authorized federal contractors. As expert users of the Library's vast English and foreign-language collections, the division's area and subject matter specialists employ the resources of the world's largest library and other information sources to produce impartial and comprehensive studies on a cost-recovery basis.

### Names, Locations, and Staff No.

1948: Established as Air Research Unit in Annex (John Adams Building); renamed Air Research Division.  
 1949: Renamed Air Studies Division.  
 1963: Renamed Defense Research Division.  
 1967: Moved to 214 Massachusetts Ave. NE.  
 1970: Renamed Federal Research Division.  
 1982: Moved to Washington Navy Yard.  
 1994: Moved to Buzzard Point Annex.  
 1996: Returned to Adams Building.

Staff numbers have fluctuated from a low of 15 to more than 200. In December 2021, there were 30 full-time staff, supplemented by external subject matter experts and contractors.

### FRD Division Chiefs

John F. Stearns, 1940s  
 William T. Walsh, 1951–71  
 William R. Dodge, 1971–80  
 Earl Rothermel, 1980–86  
 Louis Mortimer, 1991–97  
 Robert L. Worden, 1998–2007  
 David Osborne, 2007–13  
 Mukta Ohri, 2015–17  
 Kristian Hassinger, 2017–21  
 Anna K. Rorem, 2021–Present

Between 1986 and 1991, and again from 2013 to 2015, FRD had several acting chiefs. Many of these chiefs were pulled from FRD's ranks or from elsewhere in the Library.

## 1940s: Origin Story

FRD's origins lie in the Library's former Aeronautics Division, which housed significant collections of aeronautical periodicals, technical reports, and German and Japanese aviation documents that the United States had retrieved or captured from war zones. To make use of this material in service of the U.S. government, in March 1948, Librarian of Congress Luther H. Evans authorized the creation of a new organization called the Air Research Unit. This new unit within the Aeronautics Division would provide "certain research services to the United States Air Force in connection with the collections of the Library and with other materials available to the Library." By July 1948, the unit had a staff of sixty organized into four sections: Urban Area Reports, Special Reports, Technical Analysis, and Research and Abstracting.<sup>1</sup>

## 1950s–1960s: Serving the Defense Sector

Over the next two decades, the mission of performing science and technology research continued, but the nature of the work being performed broadened as the division began serving the three armed services (U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, and U.S. Air Force) on a nearly global basis. New projects also included “quick response” work to assist the Defense Intelligence Agency’s “crisis demands.”<sup>2</sup>

Although the name and scope of the division changed multiple times between the late 1940s and late 1960s, its mission to support the national defense of the United States remained the same. Cold War planning required increased development of research materials from and about the Eurasian communist nations and their allies in the developing world. Fortuitously, the exchange programs the Library of Congress developed with the Soviet Union reaped major benefits for U.S. defense planners and technologists via FRD’s research. The utilization and analysis of these unique collections had a significant national security value throughout the Cold War. Researchers across the division’s sections produced work that proved invaluable to efforts to ensure the safety of the United States and its interests. Indeed, the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency told a group of FRD managers toward the end of the Cold War that the division was “a national treasure” for what it had done to support the security of the United States.<sup>3</sup>

## 1970s–1980s: An Expanding Mandate

The division began the 1970s with another expansion of its mandate. Now known as the Federal Research Division, the organization was empowered to serve all federal agencies (excluding Congress), an opportunity that quickly resulted in new relationships with departments across government and a broadening of the subject areas on which research was conducted.<sup>4</sup>

By the late 1980s, FRD’s client base had transformed. The division that had been established to serve the U.S. Air Force—and for many years supported only the U.S. Air Force—was now serving a variety of government agencies. These agencies included:

- Executive departments, such as the U.S. Departments of Education, Energy, the Interior, Justice, Transportation, and the Treasury;
- Independent entities, such as the Army Corps of Engineers, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, National Institutes of Health, Social Security Administration, and U.S. Postal Service; and
- Court systems, such as the U.S. Court of Veterans Appeals and the Administrative Office of U.S. Courts.

However, even in this time of growth, FRD's connection to the defense community continued. New interagency agreements began with several U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) organizations, including the assumption of the U.S. Army's Area Handbook/Country Studies Series program, for which FRD produced some eighty books on around 120 countries. This was a natural fit for the division's expertise—as Librarian of Congress James H. Billington observed, FRD was for many years the largest user of the Library's foreign-language collections.<sup>5</sup>

### **1990s–2000s: Responding to a Changing World**

The 1990s heralded the arrival of the digital age, and with it transformations in the work by FRD. The division began working on a number of web-based efforts, including a major digitization project focused on providing electronic access to full-text documents from former Soviet archives concerning American military personnel held as prisoners of war or considered missing in action. This database was updated by FRD through December 2006 and is now archived by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA).<sup>6</sup>

Also for DPAA, in 1991, FRD established a searchable database of formerly classified DoD and CIA documents concerning Vietnam War-era service members missing in action. The Vietnam-Era Prisoner-of-War/Missing-in-Action Database is an analytical index of these documents. In July 2021, the database became an official Library of Congress collection that continues to be updated on a quarterly. The new database is located at <https://www.loc.gov/collections/vietnam-era-pow-mia-database>.

By the early 2000s, FRD was serving more than thirty federal agency clients and federal contractors annually. These clients now included the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Army Materiel Command, the International Trade Administration, the U.S. Census Bureau, and various Library of Congress offices. Indeed, by the middle of the decade, FRD had “carried out research for every one of the federal government’s cabinet-level departments, as well as many of the independent agencies of the executive branch.”<sup>7</sup>

Yet the rise of international terrorist organizations and their use of changing methods in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries focused FRD and its clients on the urgent need to understand and, if possible, prevent violent attacks on the United States. Between 1999 and 2015, FRD completed more than forty studies on different aspects of terrorist threats, including reports for U.S. Central Command, the Combating Terrorism Technical Support Office, the Directors of Central and National Intelligence, the Open Source Center, the Office of Naval Intelligence, and the Library's Office of Strategic Initiatives.

### FRD Researcher Who Foresaw Terrorist Attacks by Aircraft

FRD researcher Rex Hudson completed a report for the National Intelligence Council in September 1999 entitled, *The Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism: Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why?*<sup>8</sup> In it, he profiled terrorist groups, the people who join them, the escalation of hostilities, and various means of attack.

In particular, Hudson speculated on the use by al Qaeda of suicide bombers to crash airplanes into government buildings and other high-profile targets: "Suicide bomber(s) belonging to al Qaeda's Martyrdom Battalion could crash-land an aircraft packed with high explosives (C-4 and semtex) into the Pentagon, the headquarters of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), or the White House."<sup>9</sup> This prescient report, in the public domain well before 9/11, was the focus of intense scrutiny in May 2002 during the congressional inquiry into the attacks and received nationwide media attention.<sup>10</sup>

### 2010s–to Present: Internal Partnerships and a Global Pandemic

Since 2010, FRD has produced reports for over three dozen agencies, including multiple divisions within the Library of Congress. At times with the help of outside experts, researchers have written on international affairs and domestic economics, conducted surveys on education resources and federal information centers, audited and produced translations of consumer and federal housing finance documents, and developed analytic tools and data visualizations regarding international marriage laws and criminal justice systems. Within the Library, FRD has supported a number of initiatives, including the Copyright Modernization project, a major Library effort to digitize and make available to the public records held by the U.S. Copyright Office. The division has continued to build relationships with agencies across government, and is always looking for new ways to add value to deliverables.

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic made it more important than ever to be a reliable and adaptable source of accurate, timely, and non-partisan information for clients. On announcement that the Library would be shifting to full-time telework, FRD worked quickly to modify operations and ensure no loss in productivity. As a result, the staff expanded to include new skill sets and products were delivered on schedule, despite the challenges of working in a remote environment.

Throughout its more than seventy-year history, FRD has responded to shifting agency needs with dynamism, professionalism, and a desire to be on the leading edge of new research methods. Those values have guided the division through various changes in subject-matter focus, and today shepherd FRD as it seeks ways to integrate data analysis and research tools into projects both new and ongoing. Although much has changed since the division was established in 1948, after seven succeeding decades, the Federal Research Division remains dedicated to assisting all agencies and institutions under its mandate meet their research goals.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert L. Worden, "History of the Federal Research Division," April 2003, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Worden, "History of the Federal Research Division," 3.

<sup>3</sup> Robert L. Worden, "Gathering Multidisciplinary Information for the Policy-Making Community" (presentation to the Center for Research Libraries & Library of Congress International Collections Development Workshop, February 27, 2006), 2.

<sup>4</sup> John Y. Cole, *For Congress and the Nation: A Chronological History of the Library of Congress Through 1975* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1979), 130, 139, 149, and 161.

<sup>5</sup> Worden, "Gathering Multidisciplinary Information," 3.

<sup>6</sup> See "United States–Russia Joint Commission on POWs and MIAs and the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office Joint Commission Support Division Archival Documents Databases," Federal Research Division, accessed February 7, 2022, <https://memory.loc.gov/frd/tfr/tfrhome.html>; and "Fact Sheet: U.S.–Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs; Joint Commission Support Division," Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, July 20, 2020, <https://www.dpaa.mil/Resources/Fact-Sheets/Article-View/Article/569603/us-russia-joint-commission-on-powmias/>.

<sup>7</sup> Helen Dalrymple, "Unheralded but Unequaled: Federal Research Division Celebrates 60 Years of Service," *Library of Congress Information Bulletin* 67, no. 3 (March 2008): 33.

<sup>8</sup> Rex Hudson, "The Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism: Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why?," Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, September 1999, <https://irp.fas.org/threat/frd.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Hudson, "The Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism," 13.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Pete Brush, "Report Warned of Suicide Hijackings," CBS News, May 18, 2002, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/report-warned-of-suicide-hijackings/>; "Prior Hints of September 11-Type Attack," CNN.com, May 18, 2002, <https://edition.cnn.com/2002/US/05/17/bush.sept.11/index.html>; and Gwyneth K. Shaw and Tamara Lytle, "CIA Advisers Got Warning 2 1/2 Years Ago," *Orlando Sentinel*, May 18, 2002, <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/os-xpm-2002-05-18-0205180344-story.html>.