

COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THREATENING COMMUNICATIONS AND ACTUAL BEHAVIOR

Board on Behavioral, Cognitive, and Sensory Sciences
Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education
National Research Council

The National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) is a unit within the Intelligence Division of the U.S. Secret Service. NTAC conducts research on issues related to threat assessment and the prevention of targeted violence, and provides guidance on these issues to Secret Service personnel; federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies; and others with protective or public safety responsibilities. NTAC's applied behavioral research studies are designed to enhance the Secret Service's protective intelligence mission. This mission is based on the idea that the risk of harm is minimized if individuals who pose a threat can be identified, assessed, and managed before they have an opportunity to approach a person under Secret Service protection (referred to as a protectee).

NTAC is embarking on a new research program focused on examining the relationship between subjects' communications and behaviors of concern. Assessing subjects' communications and behaviors is essential to protective intelligence. Although research has investigated which behaviors might indicate whether a person is intending to approach and/or harm an individual, similar research has not been conducted examining the relationship between subjects' communications and such behaviors. The goal of this research program is to yield tools and strategies to assist the Secret Service and others with protective and public safety responsibilities in the systematic evaluation of subjects' communications and whether they are evidence of the subjects' potential risk.

Statement of Task for the National Research Council Study

The U.S. Secret Service's *National Threat Assessment Center* has requested that the National Research Council's Board on Behavioral, Cognitive, and Sensory Sciences appoint an ad hoc steering committee to plan and conduct a workshop investigating the relationship between subject's communications and behaviors of a threatening nature. The workshop will include discussions and presentations on topic areas such as 1) the variables associated with different methods of communications, 2) the relationship of these methods to risk and/or threat assessment, 3) current methodologies used to analyze these methods, and 4) how the methodologies are applied in the field. To guide the discussions at the workshop, the steering committee will commission one or more literature reviews that summarize the existing literature in these topic areas, identify gaps in the literature, and identify areas for future research. The discussion at the workshop will also help NTAC with questions and ideas that can provide a foundation upon which NTAC can initiate their own research effort aimed at improving their methods for analyzing subjects' communications.

Committee Membership

The Committee to Investigate the Relationship between Threatening Communications and Actual Behavior includes members with expertise in areas such as mental health law, clinical psychology, criminology, human factors, text analysis, qualitative data analysis, and communication technologies.

- ◆ **Doug Harris**, Committee Chair, Anacapa Sciences, Inc.
- ◆ **Judee Burgoon**, Center for the Management of Information, University of Arizona
- ◆ **Gary LaFree**, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Maryland
- ◆ **John Monahan**, School of Law, University of Virginia
- ◆ **Kimberly Neuendorf**, School of Communication, Cleveland State University
- ◆ **Mario Scalora**, Public Policy Center, University of Nebraska
- ◆ **Steve Kozlowski**, Department of Psychology, Michigan State University
- ◆ **Stuart Shulman**, Department of Political Science, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Preliminary Work Plan

Under the oversight of the Board on Behavioral, Cognitive and Sensory Sciences (BBCSS), the project will be carried out by an independent steering committee of approximately 8 members appointed by the National Research Council (NRC). The steering committee will consist of volunteers with expertise in the areas of communication generally and risk communication specifically as well as those knowledgeable about various methodologies used to assess intent. The steering committee will meet twice, once early in the project to discuss the overall plans and then again at the workshop. The committee will help to define the scope of a commissioned literature review(s), oversee the completion of the literature review(s) that will be done by a consultant(s); conceptualize and plan the workshop, identify experts to participate, and attend and help lead discussions at the workshop itself. The workshop will last 2 days, and a transcript of the proceedings will subsequently be provided to NTAC.

Staff Contact

Cherie Chauvin, Study Director
202-334-2096; cchauvin@nas.edu