

Foreign Counterintelligence

What is the FBI's foreign counterintelligence responsibility?

As the country's lead counterintelligence agency, the FBI is responsible for detecting and lawfully countering actions of foreign intelligence services and organizations that employ human and technical means to gather information about the United States which adversely affects U.S. national interests. The espionage or "spying" activities may involve the acquisition of classified, sensitive, or proprietary information from the U.S. government or U.S. companies. The FBI will investigate wherever a foreign entity conducts clandestine intelligence activities in the United States.

What is meant by "economic espionage"?

"Economic espionage" is defined by the FBI as foreign power-sponsored or coordinated intelligence activity directed at the U.S. government or U.S. corporations, establishments, or persons designed to unlawfully and clandestinely obtain sensitive financial, trade, or economic policy information; proprietary economic information; critical technologies; or to unlawfully or clandestinely influence sensitive economic policy decisions. This theft, through open and clandestine methods, can provide foreign entities with a treasure of proprietary economic information at a fraction of the true cost of their research and development, causing significant economic loss.

Do foreign spies always operate undercover?

No. Espionage can be committed by almost anyone. Recent surveys indicate that up to 74 percent of technology lost can be attributed to insiders in U.S. corporations. Espionage subjects often act on their own to fulfill requests of foreign intelligence services.

Has the use of space satellites, listening devices, and other advanced technology reduced the importance of the human foreign spy?

The human factor in espionage always will remain important. The use of high technology gives the intelligence officer anonymity. Thus, high technology enhances the efforts of foreign spies but does not replace them entirely.

Has the ending of the Cold War reduced the amount of espionage?

No. Traditional espionage has changed, with new threats from nontraditional countries. In some areas espionage has increased and actually has become more difficult to assess and predict.

Why do we so seldom hear about arrests for espionage?

Only failed attempts at espionage lead to arrests. Espionage and espionage-related matters, which cost the nation an estimated \$100 billion per year, differ from the FBI's criminal investigations in that arrest and prosecution is not and cannot be the ultimate goal. Most FBI responses to foreign intelligence activity result in neutralizing the threat, rather than by making arrests, and therefore are not known to the public.