

US terror list ensnares hundreds of thousands

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Over 40 percent of the 680,000 people on the US government's Terrorist Screening Database (TSDB) have "no recognized terrorist affiliation," according to leaked classified documents obtained by journalist Glenn Greenwald's the *Intercept*.

The government adds names or new pieces of information to existing records at a clip of 900 items per day, according to the leaked document. It is unclear how individuals wind up on the terrorist list. Watch-listing standards published previously by the *Intercept* reveal that agents only need an undefined "reasonable suspicion" and not "concrete facts," let alone "irrefutable evidence."

Names on the TSDB are shared with police agencies across the US, private contractors, and foreign governments. The list is used to enforce no-fly orders and can lead to detention when individuals are stopped for routine traffic violations or asked to submit identification to law enforcement in other circumstances.

At 280,000, "no known terrorist affiliation" is by far the largest category on the terrorist watch list. The slide which presents this figure does not attempt to explain how someone with "no known terrorist affiliation" ends up on a terrorism watch list.

The remaining nearly 400,000 individuals have some alleged connection to terrorist groups, at least as defined by the US government. This includes 73,000 with alleged ties to Al Qaeda in Iraq, and 63,000 allegedly connected to the Taliban in Afghanistan. There are a combined 43,000 with ties to Hamas and Hezbollah on the list, organizations whose primary "terrorist" activity is opposing Israel's invasions of Gaza and Lebanon. There are 93,000 in another extremely dubious category, "Other recognized terrorist group affiliation," without further explanation.

While the TSDB has long been held out by the Obama administration as a major weapon in defending the American people against terrorist attacks, it actually appears to be more of an adjunct to the US wars of aggression in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East. Only 5,000 of the 680,000 named are

Americans, so the vast majority of those listed, if they are indeed Islamic terrorists, are unlikely to board an airplane or attack a government building inside the United States. They are far more likely to become the targets of a US air strike or drone missile attack in the countries in which they live.

Given the large number of "no known terrorist affiliation" living outside the United States, the TSDB would seem intended as a database to facilitate political repression by pro-US monarchies and military dictatorships, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Jordan, all of which have staged mass arrests and imprisonment of Islamic fundamentalist radicals.

As for the 5,000 on the TSDB list who are American citizens, the *Intercept* reports that the Detroit suburb of Dearborn, Michigan, home to the largest concentration of Arab Americans in the country, has the second highest number of individuals listed, after New York City. Houston, San Diego, and Chicago round out the top five US cities for "known or suspected terrorists."

The prominence of Dearborn strongly suggests that Muslim Americans are being placed on the watch list simply because of their religion. This is reinforced by the report by Glenn Greenwald last month on the US targeting five prominent Muslim-Americans—including a Republican Party candidate and several former US government officials—for surveillance as terror suspects (see: "Snowden documents show US government spied on prominent Muslim-Americans").

The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) produced the document, which bears stamps reading "SECRET" and "NOFORN," meaning the statistics on the TSDB were not to be shared with foreign governments, including US allies. Sharing the actual names of "suspects" must certainly have been done, given the preponderance of foreign nationals, more than 99 percent of the total.

A share of the data on the list has been gathered by illegally breaking into databases maintained by foreign governments in what the *Intercept* describes as a

“previously unknown program, code-named Hydra,” operated by the CIA. Pakistan was targeted by Hydra in 2013. “Future initiatives will include additional targeted countries,” the document states.

The Terrorist Screening Database is part of a larger and more secretive terrorist watch list called Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment (TIDE). The document boasts that, as of June 29, 2013 the TIDE list had surpassed the one million name mark, “a testament to DTI’s hard work and dedication.” An unnamed official confirmed the figure to CNN. There are nearly 16,000 Americans on the TIDE list.

TIDE is managed by a virtually unknown government agency called the Directorate of Terrorist Identities, which operates within the NCTC, which in turn operates under the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. The NCTC was created to break down the constitutional wall separating the military and foreign intelligence from domestic policing functions. It draws from the FBI, the CIA, and the military’s Defense Intelligence Agency. Demonstrating the practical implications of this, the leaked document reveals that the Directorate of Terrorist Identities was “deeply involved with all aspects of the response” to the Boston Marathon bombing.

Since its formation in December, 2010, the Directorate of Terrorist Identities has added 430,000 names to TIDE, and deleted only 50,000. According to the *Intercept*, names on TIDE are shared “across the US intelligence community, as well as with commando units from the Special Operations Command and with domestic agencies such as the New York City Police Department.”

The list now includes 730,000 “biometric files,” the leaked document reveals, including facial images, fingerprints, and iris scans. The Directorate’s Biometric Analysis Branch (BAB) is obtaining facial images from driver’s license bureaus in 15 states and the District of Columbia. The report also discusses the expansion of what it calls “Non-Traditional Biometric Data.” Included in this surveillance category are “scars/marks/tattoos,” signatures and handwriting, and “DNA strands.” The TIDE list adds more than 200 “encounter reports” per day, of which an unquantified share are visa applications. A program called “Kingfisher Expansion” has screened over 4.6 million visa applications since it “went live” in June 2013.

The White House declined to publicly comment on the leaked document, though unnamed Obama administration officials told CNN they have “concluded there’s a new leaker exposing national security documents in the

aftermath of surveillance secrets disclosed by former NSA contractor Edward Snowden.”

This seems virtually certain, given that the document obtained by the *Intercept* is dated August 2013, at which point Edward Snowden was in exile in Russia, without access to any US government secret files. This suggests that at least one individual in the US intelligence apparatus, and possibly many more, has been inspired by Snowden’s courageous example to share information on what the US government is doing behind the backs of the American people.

The overriding concern of the White House and the intelligence agencies will be to find and punish the official who turned the documents over to Greenwald. The Obama administration has prosecuted more government whistleblowers than all previous administrations combined. Intelligence officials and politicians have called for the killing of Snowden and Greenwald.

The administration has previously claimed that the growth of TIDE—and the so-called “no fly list” which has been increased by a factor of ten since the Bush administration—is in response to Umar Farouk Abdulmuttalab, the so-called “underwear bomber.” Umar Farouk Abdulmuttalab was allowed to board a plane in Amsterdam for Detroit on Christmas Day 2009, despite being on the TIDE list and identified as a fanatical Islamist by his own father, who went to the US embassy in Nigeria to report him.

This follows the pattern set by the Bush administration in the wake of 9/11, when repeated warnings by FBI agents and foreign intelligence agencies were ignored, setting the stage for the deadliest terrorist attacks in US history. While no one was ever punished, or even reprimanded, for opening the door to the 9/11 attacks, the tragic loss of life at the World Trade Center and Pentagon became the pretext for the massive attack on democratic rights which followed, in the name of the “war on terror.”

The *Intercept* revelation is the latest confirmation that the “war on terror” has nothing to do with terrorism. Its purpose is to create a massive surveillance apparatus that will be deployed against the working masses the world over.



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