

TAMERLAN TSARNAEV PLACED IN DATABASE PERCEIVED AS WEAK, EVEN BY DHS

As the blame game starts on the Boston Marathon bombing, someone (maybe a blabby Senator?) made it public that the CIA asked to have Tamerlan Tsarnaev added to the Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment (TIDE) database last year.

The CIA asked the main U.S. counterterrorism agency to add the name of one of the suspected Boston Marathon bombers to a watch list more than a year before the attack, according to U.S. officials.

The agency took the step after Russian authorities contacted officials there in the fall of 2011 and raised concerns that Tamerlan Tsarnaev – who was killed last week in a confrontation with police – was seen as an increasingly radical Islamist and could be planning to travel overseas. The CIA requested that his name be put on a database maintained by the National Counterterrorism Center.

That database, the Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment, or TIDE, is a data storehouse that feeds a series of government watch lists, including the FBI's main Terrorist Screening Database and the Transportation Security Administration's "no-fly" list.

Officials said Tsarnaev's name was added to the database but it's unclear which agency added it.

We got a look at the TIDE database last year when Tom Coburn reviewed whether fusion centers do useful work. Here's what that report said

about TIDE:

While reporting information on an individual who is listed in the TIDE database sounds significant, the Subcommittee found that **DHS officials tended to be skeptical about the value of such reporting, because of concerns about the quality of data contained in TIDE.**¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Although NCTC describes its TIDE database as holding information on the identities of known and suspected terrorists, DHS officials – who interacted with TIDE data on a daily basis, as they reviewed reporting not only from state and local law enforcement encounters but from encounters by DHS components – said they found otherwise. “Not everything in TIDE is KST,” DHS privacy official Ken Hunt told the Subcommittee, using a shorthand term for “known or suspected terrorist.”

“Would you buy a Ford?” one DHS Senior Reports Officer asked the Subcommittee staff during an interview, when he was asked how serious it was for someone to be a match to a TIDE record. **“Ford Motor Company has a TIDE record.”**

[snip]

Ole Broughton headed Intelligence Oversight at I&A from September 2007 to January 2012. In an interview with the Subcommittee, Mr. Broughton expressed the concern DHS intelligence officials felt working with TIDE data. In one instance, **Mr. Broughton recalled he “saw an individual’s two-year-old son [identified] in an [Homeland Intelligence Report]. He had a TIDE record.”** Mr. Broughton believed part of the problem was that intelligence officials had routinely put information on “associates” of known or suspected

terrorists into TIDE, without determining that that person would qualify as a known or suspected terrorist. "We had a lot of discussion regarding 'associates' in TIDE," Mr. Broughton said.

[my emphasis]

This is not to say that Tamerlan shouldn't be in TIDE.

Rather, it says there's so much other crap in TIDE, that it isn't perceived as very useful – at least not by the people at DHS the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations interviewed.

This is the problem with overcollection of data: it adds a bunch more hay to the haystack for the time you want to start looking for a needle.