

TALON, GUARDIAN, INSERT YOUR NAME OF THE WEEK

Several people noted the announcement that DOD was shutting down the TALON database, wondering if the database was just going to be renamed down the line, as TIA seems to have morphed. Apparently they missed this detail:

It will be closed on Sept. 17 and information collected subsequently on potential terror or security threats to Defense Department facilities or personnel will be sent by Pentagon officials to an FBI database known as Guardian, according to Army Col. Gary Keck, a Pentagon spokesman.

Give credit to William Arkin, who actually listed this database when he appeared on Democracy Now to talk about the Talon database:

AMY GOODMAN: Does this concern you?

WILLIAM ARKIN: What do you think? Of course, it concerns me. I mean, I think that this is just one tiny picture of the actual amount of information which is collected by the F.B.I. and the intelligence community. We know that there are dozens of these databases, Cornerstone, TALON, [inaudible], the Coast Guard ICC database, the F.B.I. Guardian database, the F.B.I. TRRS database, the Joint Intelligence Task Force Counterterrorism Homeland Defense database, the SSOMB database, the BTS summary, the C.I.A. TD database, the NSA traffic database called Criss-Cross. I mean, we know that these databases are out there and that they all deal with domestic issues.

What is particularly worrisome right now

is that the National Counterterrorism Center, which was set up as part of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, is now working to conglomerate all of these databases and that the Counterintelligence Field Activities, CIFA of the Department of Defense, is working to ensure that the military gains access to all of these databases, as well. So each of these, which goes into the creation of various watch lists and various tip-offs for the military or the intelligence community to surveil certain people, that determine the key words that the NSA or the F.B.I. then uses in its surveillance to catch certain emails or certain telephone conversations or certain international communications, all of these are now becoming more and more efficiently employed, the notion being that somehow we're going to catch the next Mohammed Atta, but the reality being that huge numbers of innocent, non-threatening American citizens are being swept up in this gigantic swirl.

So while this particular database is out of control of CIFA and under control of the FBI (anyone thinking of how well FBI managed the National Security Letters), that may just mean the data is now accessible to more people. And like the TALON database, the Guardian database is apparently not very well-suited to perform its function (or at least wasn't, last year).

While the FBI has created the Guardian Threat Tracking System (Guardian) to manage the resolution of threats and suspicious incidents, this system is neither easily searchable nor a useful tool for identifying trends in types of incidents. As a result, during our audit the FBI could not identify the number of maritime-related threats from 2002 to the present.

I can't decide which is worse. That they have these databases. Or that they can't build them to be effective.