Counter-Terrorism Profiteers, With Your Money

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A National Counter-terrorism Center and a Director of National Intelligence with ever greater authority. An FBI Terrorist Screening Center that can reach far and wide to local law enforcement. The Defense Intelligence Agency's Joint Task Force for Counter-Terrorism and a Counterintelligence Field Activity at the Defense Department. And of course a Department of Homeland Security and its military counter-part the U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM).

Broken stovepipes of information, a PATRIOT act, actionable intelligence out the whazoo.

Post 9/11, the government argues – it doesn't even have to argue, it is just assumed – that the intelligence and law enforcement nexus has never been closer, that warnings are so seamless and complete if anything most people worry that the government has too much information, not too little.

No potential terrorist is going to sneak through this new system, no government agency is ever going to go wanting for more information.

So it just burns me up this week to see a prominent military command preparing to pay a private company to provide it with terrorist warnings.

This week U.S. Air Force Space Command, a major command headquartered in Colorado Springs, CO, issued a solicitation called "Terrorism Threat Research" (thanks MS) saying that it was planning to license a "terrorism research database" to receive "real-time" warnings via pager, cell phone, and PDA.

The database is produced by IntelCenter, one of a cottage industry that has sprung up since the early 1990's to feed at the counter-terrorism trough. According to the group's website, the IntelCenter's "primary client base is comprised of military, law enforcement and intelligence agencies in the US and other allied countries around the world."

Space Command wants to obtain 20 licenses to the IntelCenter's U.S. Government Terrorism Threat Intelligence Package ($1650.00 per license according to the IntelCenter website).

This database, according to Space Command, includes "weekly and or real time email notifications of all significant terrorist, rebel group and other related activity, including bombings, assassinations, kidnappings, significant dates, threats and organizational changes within groups."

IntelCenter will also provide warnings relating to "developments concerning intelligence agencies around the world including operational issues, organizational developments, new

initiatives, espionage trials, new technologies and other related issues."

And finally, IntelCenter will receive "real-time dissemination of raw statements, fatwas, announcements, and other messages directly from terrorist, rebel, extremist, and other organizations themselves."

The immediate question is: isn't this what all of these new "long war" commands and reorganized and beefed-up intelligence agencies with all of their new databases and data mining and authorities supposed to do?

Okay, by government standards, $32,000 annually is petty cash. But there must be dozens of additional agencies and commands buying the IntelCenter product and hundreds if not thousands of licenses paid for with your and my tax dollars.

Everyone senses that we have a contractor crisis in our national security community, too many contractors acting like wild west prospectors in Iraq and the Middle East, contractors doing what we used to think of as "mission essential" jobs in headquarters and agencies.

More power — and money — to IntelCenter for turning al Qaeda into a business; I'm sure their product and work are excellent.

But it makes you wonder what the tens of thousands of government employees working in U.S. intelligence agencies actually do. It makes you wonder why it could be that if this information is so useful to Space Command and the government that it shouldn't be provided by our $40 billion intelligence community directly.

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