

“Keeping America Safe”-from the Constitution

Total Information Awareness Finds its "Second Life" at IARPA

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Like countless resurrections of [Freddy Krueger](#), it appears that John Poindexter's Total Information Awareness (TIA) program has found a new, more accommodating home for its "mission" of "keeping America safe"-from the Constitution-at the Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Agency (IARPA).

According to *McClatchy* investigative journalist [Warren Strobel](#),

IARPA ... is the U.S. intelligence community's counterpart to DARPA, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, which has been in business for more than 35 years and is meant to be a small, flexible R&D agency that funds high-risk, but potentially high-payoff technologies. ("What's IARPA?", *McClatchy* Washington Bureau, June 30, 2008)

IARPA has been organized under the auspices of Office of Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) Mike McConnell, a former executive vice-president with spooky mega-contractor [Booz Allen Hamilton](#). As Tim Shorrock [reported](#) in March,

As Booz Allen's chief intelligence liaison to the Pentagon, McConnell was at the center of action, both before and after the September 11 attacks. During the first six years of the Bush administration, Booz Allen's contracts with the U.S. government rose dramatically, from \$626,000 in 2000 to \$1.6 billion in 2006. McConnell and his staff at Booz Allen were deeply involved in some of the Bush administration's most controversial counterterrorism programs. They included the Pentagon's infamous Total Information Awareness data-mining scheme run by former Navy Admiral John Poindexter, which was an attempt to collect information on potential terrorists in America from phone records, credit card receipts and other databases. (Congress cancelled the program over civil liberties concerns, but much of the work was transferred to the NSA, where Booz Allen continued to receive the contracts.) ("Carlyle Group May Buy Major CIA Contractor: Booz Allen Hamilton, CorpWatch, March 8, 2008)

According to the agency's website, IARPA's [brief](#) is centered on three program areas:

Smart Collection, "The goal of the programs in this office is to dramatically improve the value of collected data from all sources."

Incisive Analysis, "The goal of the programs in this office is to maximize insight from the information we collect, in a timely fashion."

Safe & Secure Operations, "The goal of the programs in this office is to be able to

counter new capabilities implemented by our adversaries that would threaten our ability to operate freely and effectively in a networked world.”

There’s no argument that preventing sociopaths-state-sponsored or otherwise-using malware to cause the meltdown of a nuclear power plant’s uranium core or the sudden release of methyl isocyanate into the atmosphere should be a priority of any *sane* government. Certainly such laudatory goals would be optimized by *writing better programs* rather than through intrusive data-mining ops carried out by the state’s outsourced and well-paid private “partners.”

Unfortunately, we aren’t dealing with a sane government here in the United States. According to [Virtual Worlds News](#), one IARPA program seeks to “mine” information from virtual worlds and online gaming sites for its potential to “model” terrorist activity.

Reynard, a data-mining project from Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity (IARPA), is an exploratory effort to monitor activity in virtual worlds and online games and then model what terrorist activity in those worlds would look like. The Director of National Intelligence recently released a Congressionally mandated report on various data-mining projects of which Reynard is just one. While it’s just an early effort right now, “If it shows early promise, this small seedling effort may increase its scope to a full project.”

Data-mining is defined as “a program involving pattern-based queries, searches or other analyses of 1 or more electronic databases” in order to “discover or locate a predictive pattern of anomaly indicative of terrorist or criminal activity...” and will now be ongoing “in a public virtual world environment. The research will use publicly available data and begin with observational studies to establish baseline behaviors.”

No word on what world that will be in, but we already know that the CIA has a presence in Second Life and that IARPA has investigated Linden Lab’s world as well. (“U.S. Project Reynard Mines Data Looking for Virtual Spies,” [Virtual Worlds News](#), February 25, 2008)

One can only wonder what IARPA will do once “baseline behaviors” are mapped! But apparently there’s no need to fret since “the government understands that ‘applications of results from these research projects may ultimately have implications for privacy and civil liberties,’ so ‘IARPA is also investing in projects that develop privacy protecting technologies,’” [Secrecy News reports](#).

We bet they are! But as Strobel points out, “IARPA’s ancestry is a wee bit interesting”:

In the beginning, there was Total Information Awareness, a DARPA information-gathering program run by noneother than former Iran-Contra figure and Reagan national security adviser John Poindexter. Critics saw the program as a major, post-9/11 intrusion on American’s privacy and civil liberties, and Congress killed funding for it in 2003. But there were persistent reports—confirmed by yours truly in conversations with former U.S. intelligence officials—that portions of the Total Information Awareness research had simply been shunted off to other agencies.

As readers undoubtedly recall, Total Information Awareness (TIA) was “terminated” by

Congress when it learned that Poindexter was setting up a program that would sift through “public databases storing credit card purchases, rental agreements, medical histories, e-mails, airline reservations, and phone calls for electronic ‘footprints’ that might indicate a terrorist plot in the making,” according to Shorrock’s excellent read, [Spies for Hire](#).

And to whom did DARPA turn to manage TIA? Why none other than Booz Allen Hamilton, of course! Joining SAIC (Science Applications International Corporation), Booz Allen “won” some \$63 million in contracts to run Poindexter’s pet project. While the program—and contracts—were allegedly cancelled, portions of TIA had simply been spun-off to other agencies including the [FBI](#) and NSA.

Where else did TIA migrate? It turns out, many of its data-mining projects, including the Scalable Social Network Analysis (SSNA) operation, which seeks to model networks of connections like social interactions, financial transactions, telephone calls, and organizational memberships into a coherent analytical tool, were “assimilated” by the Advanced Research and Development Activity (ARDA), managed by NSA.

Strobel reports that “ARDA was later renamed, given the ominous-sounding moniker, Disruptive Technology Office.” And now ARDA and DTO along with a “new and improved” TIA, have apparently been folded into IAPRA.

Which just goes to show, you can’t kill off that which the state decrees is necessary for “your protection.” As [Wired’s](#) Ryan Singel advises online gaming enthusiasts, you’d better “be careful who you frag”!

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