

Big Brother “Fusion Centers” Part of US Domestic Intelligence and Surveillance Apparatus

Mammoth Budget: \$75 Billion, 200,000 Operatives

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Global Research, September 26, 2009

[Antifascist Calling...](#) 26 September 2009

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

Fusion Centers Will Have Access to Classified Military Intelligence

Speaking at San Francisco’s Commonwealth Club September 15, Director of National Intelligence Admiral Dennis C. Blair, disclosed that the current annual budget for the 16 agency U.S. “Intelligence Community” (IC) clocks-in at \$75 billion and employs some 200,000 operatives world-wide, including private contractors.

In unveiling an unclassified version of the National Intelligence Strategy (NIS), Blair asserts he is seeking to break down “this old distinction between military and nonmilitary intelligence,” stating that the “traditional fault line” separating secretive military programs from overall intelligence activities “is no longer relevant.”

As if to emphasize the sweeping nature of Blair’s remarks, Federal Computer Week reported September 17 that “some non-federal officials with the necessary clearances who work at intelligence fusion centers around the country will soon have limited access to classified terrorism-related information that resides in the Defense Department’s classified network.” According to the publication:

Under the program, authorized state, local or tribal officials will be able to access pre-approved data on the Secret Internet Protocol Router Network. However, they won’t have the ability to upload data or edit existing content, officials said. They also will not have access to all classified information, only the information that federal officials make available to them.

The non-federal officials will get access via the Homeland Security department’s secret-level Homeland Security Data Network. That network is currently deployed at 27 of the more than 70 fusion centers located around the country, according to DHS. Officials from different levels of government share homeland security-related information through the fusion centers. (Ben Bain, “DOD opens some classified information to non-federal officials,” Federal Computer Week, September 17, 2009)

Since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the federal government has encouraged the explosive growth of fusion centers. As envisaged by securocrats, these hybrid institutions have expanded information collection and sharing practices from a wide variety of sources, including commercial databases, among state and local law enforcement agencies, the private sector and federal security agencies, including military intelligence.

But early on, fusion centers like the notorious “red squads” of the 1960s and ’70s, morphed into national security shopping malls where officials monitor not only alleged terrorists but also left-wing and environmental activists deemed threats to the existing corporate order.

It is currently unknown how many military intelligence analysts are stationed at fusion centers, what their roles are and whether or not they are engaged in domestic surveillance.

If past practices are an indication of where current moves by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) will lead, in breaking down the “traditional fault line” that prohibits the military from engaging in civilian policing, then another troubling step along the dark road of militarizing American society will have been taken.

U.S. Northern Command: Feeding the Domestic Surveillance Beast

Since its 2002 stand-up, U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) and associated military intelligence outfits such as the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and the now-defunct Counterintelligence Field Activity (CIFA) have participated in widespread surveillance of antiwar and other activist groups, tapping into Pentagon and commercial databases in a quixotic search for “suspicious patterns.”

As they currently exist, fusion centers are largely unaccountable entities that function without proper oversight and have been involved in egregious civil rights violations such as the compilation of national security dossiers that have landed activists on various terrorist watch-lists.

Antifascist Calling reported last year on the strange case of Marine Gunnery Sgt. Gary Maziarz and Col. Larry Richards, Marine reservists stationed at Camp Pendleton in San Diego. Maziarz, Richards, and a group of fellow Marines, including the cofounder of the Los Angeles County Terrorist Early Warning Center (LACTEW), stole secret files from the Strategic Technical Operations Center (STOC).

When they worked at STOC, the private spy ring absconded with hundreds of classified files, including those marked “Top Secret, Special Compartmentalized Information,” the highest U.S. Government classification. The files included surveillance dossiers on the Muslim community and antiwar activists in Southern California.

According to the San Diego Union-Tribune which broke the story in 2007, before being run to ground Maziarz, Richards and reserve Navy Commander Lauren Martin, a civilian intelligence contractor at USNORTHCOM, acquired information illegally obtained from the Secret Internet Protocol Router Network (SIPRNet). This is the same classified system which fusion centers will have access to under the DoD’s new proposal.

Claiming they were acting out of “patriotic motives,” the Marine spies shared this classified counterterrorism information with private contractors in the hope of obtaining future employment. Although they failed to land plush private sector counterterrorism jobs, one cannot rule out that less than scrupulous security firms might be willing to take in the bait in the future in order to have a leg up on the competition.

So far, only lower level conspirators have been charged. According to the Union-Tribune “Marine Cols. Larry Richards and David Litaker, Marine Maj. Mark Lowe and Navy Cmdr. Lauren Martin also have been mentioned in connection with the case, but none has been

charged.” One codefendant’s attorney, Kevin McDermott, told the paper, “This is the classic situation that if you have more rank, the better your chance of not getting charged.”

Sound familiar? Call it standard operating procedure in post-constitutional America where high-level officials and senior officers walk away scott-free while grunts bear the burden, and do hard time, for the crimes of their superiors.

Fusion Centers and Military Intelligence: Best Friends Forever!

Another case which is emblematic of the close cooperation among fusion centers and military intelligence is the case of John J. Towery, a Ft. Lewis, Washington civilian contractor who worked for the Army’s Fort Lewis Force Protection Unit.

In July, The Olympian and Democracy Now! broke the story of how Towery had infiltrated and spied on the Olympia Port Militarization Resistance (OlyPMR), an antiwar group, and shared this information with police.

Since 2006, the group has staged protests at Washington ports and has sought to block military cargo from being shipped to Iraq. According to The Olympian:

OlyPMR member Brendan Maslauskas Dunn said in an interview Monday that he received a copy of the e-mail from the city of Olympia in response to a public records request asking for any information the city had about “anarchists, anarchy, anarchism, SDS (Students for a Democratic Society), or Industrial Workers of the World.” (Jeremy Pawloski, “Fort Lewis investigates claims employee infiltrated Olympia peace group,” The Olympian, July 27, 2009)

What Dunn discovered was highly disturbing to say the least. Towery, who posed as an anarchist under the name “John Jacob,” had infiltrated OlyPMR and was one of several listserv administrators that had control over the group’s electronic communications.

The civilian intelligence agent admitted to Dunn that he had spied on the group but claimed that no one paid him and that he didn’t report to the military; a statement that turned out to be false.

Joseph Piek, a Fort Lewis spokesperson confirmed to The Olympian that Towery was a contract employee and that the infiltrator “performs sensitive work within the installation law enforcement community,” but “it would not be appropriate for him to discuss his duties with the media.”

In September, The Olympian obtained thousands of pages of emails from the City of Olympia in response to that publication’s public-records requests. The newspaper revealed that the Washington Joint Analytical Center (WJAC), a fusion center, had copied messages to Towery on the activities of OlyPMR in the run-up to the group’s November 2007 port protests. According to the paper,

The WJAC is a clearinghouse of sorts of anti-terrorism information and sensitive intelligence that is gathered and disseminated to law enforcement agencies across the state. The WJAC receives money from the federal government.

The substance of nearly all of the WJAC's e-mails to Olympia police officials had been blacked out in the copies provided to The Olympian. (Jeremy Pawloski, "Army e-mail sent to police and accused spy," The Olympian, September 12, 2009)

Also in July, the whistleblowing web site Wikileaks published a 1525 page file on WJAC's activities.

Housed at the Seattle Field Office of the FBI, one document described WJAC as an agency that "builds on existing intelligence efforts by local, regional, and federal agencies by organizing and disseminating threat information and other intelligence efforts to law enforcement agencies, first responders, and key decision makers throughout the state."

Fusion centers are also lucrative cash cows for enterprising security grifters. Wikileaks investigations editor Julian Assange described the revolving-door that exists among Pentagon spy agencies and the private security firms who reap millions by placing interrogators and analysts inside outfits such as WJAC. Assange wrote,

There has been extensive political debate in the United States on how safe it would be to move Guantánamo's detainees to US soil—but what about their interrogators?

One intelligence officer, Kia Grapham, is hawked by her contracting company to the Washington State Patrol. Grapham's confidential resume boasts of assisting in over 100 interrogations of "high value human intelligence targets" at Guantánamo. She goes on, saying how she is trained and certified to employ Restricted Interrogation Technique: Separation as specified by FM 2-22.3 Appendix M.

Others, like, Neoma Syke, managed to repeatedly flip between the military and contractor intelligence work—without even leaving the building.

The file details the placement of six intelligence contractors inside the Washington Joint Analytical Center (WAJAC) on behalf of the Washington State Patrol at a cost of around \$110,000 per year each.

Such intelligence "fusion" centers, which combine the military, the FBI, state police, and others, have been internally promoted by the US Army as means to avoid restrictions preventing the military from spying on the domestic population. (Julian Assange, "The spy who billed me twice," Wikileaks, July 29, 2009)

The Wikileaks documents provide startling details on how firms such as Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC), The Sytex Group and Operational Applications Inc. routinely place operatives within military intelligence and civilian fusion centers at a premium price.

Assange wonders whether these job placements are not simply evidence of corruption but rather, are "designed to evade a raft of hard won oversight laws which apply to the military and the police but not to contractors? Is it to keep selected personnel out of the Inspector General's eye?" The available evidence strongly suggests that it is.

As the American Civil Liberties Union documented in their 2007 and 2008 reports on fusion center abuses, one motivation is precisely to subvert oversight laws which do not apply to private mercenary contractors.

The civil liberties' watchdog characterized the rapid expansion of fusion centers as a threat to our constitutional rights and cited specific areas of concern: "their ambiguous lines of authority, the troubling role of private corporations, the participation of the military, the use of data mining and their excessive secrecy."

And speaking of private security contractors outsourced to a gaggle on intelligence agencies, investigative journalist Tim Shorrock revealed in his essential book *Spies For Hire*, that since 9/11 "the Central Intelligence Agency has been spending 50 to 60 percent of its budget on for-profit contractors, or about \$2.5 billion a year, and its number of contract employees now exceeds the agency's full-time workforce of 17,500."

Indeed, Shorrock learned that "no less than 70 percent of the nation's intelligence budget was being spent on contracts." However, the sharp spike in intelligence outsourcing to well-heeled security corporations comes with very little in the way of effective oversight.

The House Intelligence Committee reported in 2007 that the Bush, and now, the Obama administrations have failed to develop a "clear definition of what functions are 'inherently governmental';" meaning in practice, that much in the way of systematic abuses can be concealed behind veils of "proprietary commercial information."

As we have seen when the Abu Ghraib torture scandal broke in 2004, and The New York Times belatedly blew the whistle on widespread illegal surveillance of the private electronic communications of Americans in 2005, cosy government relationships with security contractors, including those embedded within secretive fusion centers, will continue to serve as a "safe harbor" for concealing and facilitating state crimes against the American people.

After all, \$75 billion buys a lot of silence.

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