

More than 755,000 on US terrorist watch list

By [Global Research](#)

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WASHINGTON (AFP) -- The US terrorist watch list includes more than 755,000 names and continues to grow, the US Government Accountability Office said Wednesday.

The list exploded from fewer than 20 entries before the September 11, 2001 attacks to more than 150,000 just a few months later, after the Terrorist Screening Center (TSC) was created in December 2003 to keep tabs on terrorist suspects, according to the GAO, the non-partisan investigative arm of Congress.

Including known pseudonyms of suspects, the list's 755,000 names as of May 2007 represents, in fact, around 300,000 people, according to TSC estimates.

Tasked with gathering data on individuals "known or appropriately suspected to be or have been engaged in conduct constituting, in preparation for, in aid of or related to terrorism," the TSC gets its information from Federal Bureau of Investigation intelligence and passes it on chiefly to immigration authorities.

Since 2003, the list has been used around 53,000 times to single out individuals for possible arrest or to prevent them from entering the country, the GAO said.

More often, however, people whose names are included on the list for reasons of caution are merely questioned and released, and left to face the same annoyance each time they enter the country, GAO said.

Despite the precautionary zeal, there have been mistakes, it said, adding that many suspects have been stopped by immigration authorities on arrival at US airports when their entries in the TSC list should have prevented them from boarding their planes in the first place.

Describing the list as "quicksand" that traps innocent people for the sake of security, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has called on the US Congress to step in.

"How much safer are we when the government turns so many innocent people into suspects?" ACLU senior legislative counsel.

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