

Homeland Security Weighs Use of Anti-Terrorist Database

Several terrorism databases under study and pending intelligence reform together are expected to bolster anti-terrorism data-gathering and -sharing efforts.

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Dec. 16, 2004

URL: <http://www.informationweek.com/story/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=55800554>

The Bush administration will be better positioned in 2005 to better respond to post-9/11 calls for more efficient anti-terrorism and law-enforcement intelligence data gathering and sharing.

Congress Wednesday presented President Bush with its proposed intelligence reform legislation, which, if signed, would create a new director of national intelligence. The Homeland Security Department, meanwhile, has evaluated data and database software that could help the department track terrorist suspects via information about their criminal activities, finances, and personal and political affiliations.

Homeland Security in August tested the usefulness of a database filled with 250,000 profiles of high-risk and potential high-risk people and organizations culled from arrest records, news reports, and other information sources across more than 220 countries and territories. Homeland Security would not provide details of the test. However, the database's owner, U.K.-based World-Check, confirmed that Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency tested the usability of World-Check database along with an interface provided by Safe Banking Systems Software LLC, a New York-based provider of messaging, processing, and compliance software. Homeland Security has not determined whether the technology will be used in an official capacity, says a spokesman for the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency.

"This system was provided on a trial basis only," he says. "There's no timeframe for any official use of the system." Although the use of third-party companies to help provide and manage anti-terrorist and law-enforcement data has come under fire for potentially violating privacy rights, particularly with the [Multistate Antiterrorism Information Exchange \(Matrix\)](#), World-Check CEO David Leppan says his company's data is pulled from public sources and the company's practices are governed by the U.K.'s [Data Protection Act](#). "We don't give our opinion," he says. "We simply correlate data that's in the public domain."

World-Check's database first went live in January 2001 with about 35,000 records. The company adds as many as 10,000 records to the database monthly. Its objective is to filter unstructured data from a variety of sources and make that data usable for financial institutions and government agencies. These customers host World-Check's database within their own firewall and receive updates to the database from World-Check twice daily.

Regardless of whether Homeland Security chooses to adopt World-Check's database on a permanent basis, the young department has placed a high priority on data sharing. Homeland Security, for example, continues to test its [Homeland Secure Data Network](#), a network of networks that will be used to let government analysts search a variety of intelligence databases, with specific access dependent upon the individual's level of security clearance. Privacy issues have not been raised over

the homeland secure data network for a couple of reasons: first, the network is being created and run by the government using data it already had access to; second, the issue with Matrix and, potentially with World-Check, is that a private company is supplying and/or managing the data.