



March 12, 2009

USA Today Letter To The Editor (as submitted)

The USA Today article "Terrorist Watch List Hits 1 Million" provided a good overview of how the watchlist helps combat terrorism and the efforts of the Terrorist Screening Center (TSC) to ensure watchlist data is current, accurate and thorough. I would like to provide some clarification on a couple of issues:

The terrorist watchlist includes more than 1 million records – not "entries," as reported – because TSC creates a separate record for each piece of data related to watchlisted individuals. That is why those records only correspond to approximately 400,000 individuals – only about 5% of whom are U.S. citizens or legal residents.

The article reports the removal last year of 33,000 "entries" or "records" – it confusingly uses both. A single watchlisted "individual" can maintain many false "identities" and TSC may use a number of "records" to store distinct identifying data about each. To help clarify, 33,000 identities were removed in 2008 by being deleted altogether, merged with other identities or replaced with modified information.

The article may have also confused why people file redress claims. While some may be misidentified with a watchlisted individual because of a similar name that does not account for "most" of the 51,000 complaints as reported. Many people who file redress claims may think they are on the watchlist but their inconvenience may be attributable to other causes they would be unaware of.

Finally, the Terrorist Screening Center follows a standard of reasonable suspicion for adding people to the watchlist and independent oversight reviews have confirmed we properly follow our procedures.

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The U.S. Terrorist Screening Center (TSC), established December 2003 by Homeland Security Presidential Directive-6, serves as the U.S. Government's consolidation point for known and suspected terrorist watchlist information, both foreign and domestic. The consolidated watchlist contains records that are updated daily and shared with Federal, state, local, territorial, tribal law enforcement and intelligence community agencies as well as international partners to ensure that individuals with links to terrorism are appropriately screened. The TSC is a multi-agency organization administered by the National Security Branch of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

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