

FBI is key in war on terrorism

Fingerprint identification a big part of arsenal used to track down terror suspects

by Gary A. Harki
STAFF WRITER

CLARKSBURG — West Virginia may be located far from Iraq and Afghanistan, but the FBI center located just outside of Clarksburg has a growing importance in the fight against terrorism.

The FBI Criminal Justice Information Services Division is checking its database of 50 million fingerprints against fingerprints of detainees in the Middle East and other areas, said Thomas E. Bush III, assistant director of the FBI CJIS division.



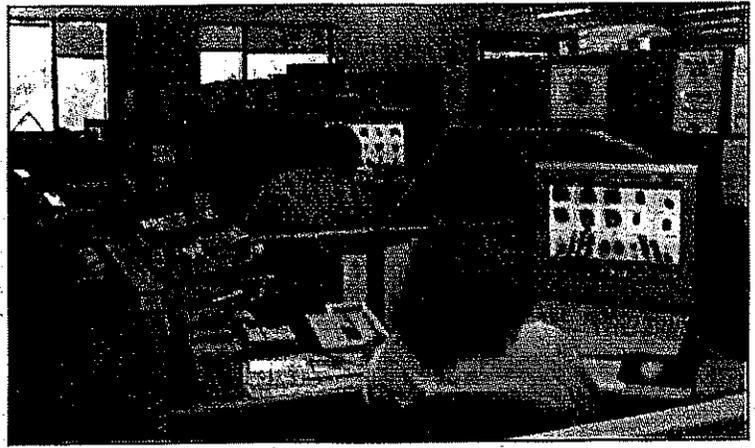
Staff photo

Thomas Bush, assistant director of CJIS, says technology allows fingerprints from all over the world to be examined in Clarksburg.

according to the FBI Web site. Prints are now sifted through both systems to look for suspected terrorists, the site said.

Last year, a round-up of suspected terrorists in Iraq were fingerprinted and checked against the CJIS database. CJIS found 44 suspects who had criminal records in the United States and two who were sought on federal warrants, according to the FBI Web site.

See FBI, A8



Staff photo by Jonah W.B. Myers

FBI CJIS fingerprint examiners work on filing newly received prints at the FBI center in Harrison County.

FBI

(Continued from Page A1)

When or if suspects are captured because of the terrorist bombings in London, it is likely their fingerprints will go through the same CJIS database used by law enforcement all over the United States, Bush said.

"We have always taken fingerprints from other countries or foreign fugitives, but probably a fairly limited number," he said.

Now the technology exists to allow fingerprints from all over the world to be checked against the CJIS integrated automated fingerprint identification system, Bush said.

The process of linking the fingerprint system to the Department of Defense began after 9/11, he said.

"We put every print we could of every suspected terrorist in our system," Bush said. "Folks come into this country and use a different name or alias and we have the fingerprints on file."

Now within the database of 50 million fingerprints is a smaller file of suspected terrorists, which continues to grow, Bush said.

Suspected al Qaeda terrorist Mohamad al Kahtani was positively identified at Guantanamo Bay based on fingerprints taken when he was

denied entry into the United States in 2001, the Web site said.

"That is the beauty of it: A guy comes in and says, 'I'm a lowly shepherd, I'm a sheep herder, I just got caught up in all this,'" Bush said. "Then we find out he tried to get into the U.S. before or that he has a criminal history or is using a completely different name. Maybe he has been arrested in other countries. Now we are looking at this guy in a different light."

After 9/11, initially the Department of Defense was going to create its own, separate database of fingerprints. But the FBI already had a well-established system that the military could utilize, Bush said.

Use of the database, and collection of fingerprints, should expand and include more prints from other countries in the future, he said. And in turn, other countries could use the database, located at CJIS in West Virginia.

"Clearly since 9/11 we have a role, we believe a major role, in providing security to the country by getting (suspected terrorists) on file," Bush said. "Once we have it, it is available to 17,000 law enforcement departments in the U.S. plus other federal agencies."

Staff writer Gary Harki can be reached at 626-1404 or by e-mail at gharki@exponent-telegram.com