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Pentagon creates enemy biometric database

By JASON SHERMAN

The Pentagon has launched a pilot program to collect the fingerprints — and eventually DNA samples, palm prints, voice sounds and iris patterns — of potential enemies in its war on terrorism.

U.S. troops already are collecting fingerprints to feed a new military database that will be modeled on — and linked to — the FBI's fingerprint library, which is the world's largest biometric collection, with the prints and criminal histories of 47 million people. The prints are the first step in building what proponents hope will be a comprehensive system that uses biometric factors to identify people.

Those being fingerprinted will include detainees, enemy prisoners of war, civilian internees and foreigners under U.S. government control who are perceived as national security threats and deemed to require further background checks.

"In the global war on terrorism, the Defense Department and the U.S. government cannot trust the names and documents that are presented to authorities in order to establish true identity," John Woodward, head of office overseeing the effort, said in an e-mail response to questions. "We must develop a method for linking an individual to their past alias identities and activities, particularly criminal and terrorist activities."

Woodward is director of the Defense Department's Biometric Management Office.

Lockheed Martin Information Systems, Seabrook, Md., which built the FBI's fingerprint system, was awarded \$5 million by the Pentagon on Sept. 10 for the first

year of a five-year contract to begin building the military's fingerprint system.

Company officials declined requests for an interview through a spokesman because of the "sensitivity of the project."

Barry Steinhardt, director of the American Civil Liberties Union's technology and liberty program, said the Pentagon's biometric efforts are worthwhile — as long as they focus outward.

"What would worry me about this is that systems used by the Defense Department off American soil are going to find themselves migrating back to the U.S. ... and turned on American residents," Steinhardt said.

Wider sharing of information

The Pentagon's new Automated Biometric Identification System and its databases will be based near the FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services Division and Automated Fingerprint Identification System in Clarksburg, W.Va.

The Biometric Management Office is spearheading a number of efforts to lay the groundwork to ensure biometric technologies are effective tools for the military.

The office is working to set standards that will permit agencies to share and compare biometric data. And technical architectures are being crafted to organize how information will be stored, searched, matched and shared.

In February, the Pentagon's chief information officer required all military units that collect electronic fingerprints from enemy combatants to comply with internationally accepted fingerprint standards.



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An orange-clad detainee is surrounded by guards in his cell at Camp X-Ray on the Navy's base at Guantanamo, Cuba. The military is collecting the fingerprints of detainees and other potential enemies as part of a new biometric database.