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Office of Homeland Security
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New Terrorist Screening Center Established

Federal Government Consolidates Terrorist Screening Into Single Comprehensive Anti-Terrorist Watchlist

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Attorney General John Ashcroft, Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge, Secretary of State Colin Powell, FBI Director Robert Mueller and Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet today announced the establishment of the Terrorist Screening Center (TSC) to consolidate terrorist watchlists and provide 24/7 operational support for thousands of federal screeners across the country and around the world. The Center will ensure that government investigators, screeners and agents are working off the same unified, comprehensive set of anti-terrorist information - and that they have access to information and expertise that will allow them to act quickly when a suspected terrorist is screened or stopped.

Today's action marks another significant step forward in President George W. Bush's strategy to protect America's communities and families by detecting, disrupting and disabling terrorist threats.

"The creation of the TSC is one of several new critical initiatives taken by this Administration to increase the sharing of information at all levels of government. The Department's new Information Analysis and Infrastructure Protection (IA/IP) unit allows DHS to analyze information and take specific action to protect critical infrastructure. Another important development, the Terrorist Threat Integration Center (TTIC), was created to ensure that all members of the federal government's intelligence community have access to the same information," said Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge. "The job of the new Terrorist Screening Center is to make sure we get this information out to our agents on the borders and all those who can put it to use on the front lines - and to get it there fast."

The TSC builds on numerous steps taken by this Administration since the attacks of September 11, 2001, to improve our ability to identify and stop terrorists before they act against us. For example, the TTIC and the IA/IP Directorate were designed to enhance intelligence fusion - to bring together all terrorist information in one place, enabling America's best intelligence analysts and investigators from multiple departments to work as a team to put together the pieces of the puzzle.

"President Bush's number one priority is protecting the lives and liberties of the American people by defeating terrorism," said Attorney General Ashcroft. "Right now, there are several major watchlists and related systems. But with each separate watchlist comes the potential for another seam. The Terrorist Screening Center will provide 'one-stop shopping' so that every federal anti-terrorist screener is working off the same page -- whether it's an airport screener, an embassy official issuing visas overseas, or an FBI agent on the street. The creation of the new Center means that all government

agents will be able to run name checks against the same comprehensive list with the most accurate, up-to-date information about potential terrorists. That's how we can stop terrorists before they launch an attack."

"The Department of State is proud to be part of the Terrorist Screening Center," Secretary of State Powell said. "This cooperative effort will help the United States fight terrorism by identifying visa applicants and others who are known to be threats to our security, before they can do us harm. Combining the knowledge of the FBI, Department of Justice, Intelligence Community, Department of Homeland Security and the Department of State's TIPOFF program is a long-desired goal that is now reality. We are gratified that the State Department's TIPOFF program, which contains over 100,000 names of potential terrorists, will form the basis for both the TTIC and TSC databases. Real-time access by our consular officers to the information provided by the other agencies will make visa issuance more secure and better protect America's borders. We look forward to a successful partnership with our fellow agencies in the war on terrorism."

"The TSC will increase the chances of detaining or arresting terrorists before they strike," said Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet.

"What's different about the TSC is the ability to make that information available in real time, constantly updated, 24 hours a day and across the board," said FBI Director Robert Mueller. "By providing this around-the-clock service to anti-terrorist screeners throughout the federal government, the new Center will ensure not only that those who need it will have access to the best, most current information, but they will also have access to on-call experts who can support them in taking immediate and appropriate action to stop terrorists and prevent attacks at any hour of the day or night."

In addition to establishing the IA/IP Directorate of the Department of Homeland Security, the TTIC, and the new TSC, the Administration since 2001 has undertaken a series of concerted steps to ensure the effective use of watchlist information to disrupt and apprehend terrorists. The Department of State and the CIA are collaborating to ensure that the identities of thousands of known and suspected terrorists are integrated into the State Department's TIPOFF system and accessible to consular officers and Department of Homeland Security border inspectors worldwide. The FBI has made information on subjects of their terrorism investigations accessible through the National Crime Information Center system to 650,000 state and local law enforcement officers nationwide and has established a 24/7 watchlist unit to respond to calls from the field. The Department of Homeland Security's Transportation Security Administration has established a "no fly" list, which has led to the successful apprehension of several dangerous terrorist suspects.

The TSC is the government's latest step in an ongoing effort to integrate counter-terrorism efforts by all components of the federal government. The consolidation of terrorist information and screening through the TSC is vital to protecting the American people from terrorist threats. The 9/11 Congressional Joint Inquiry recommended the creation of such a Center to coordinate and integrate all terrorist-related watchlist systems.

The new TSC is a multi-agency center, anchored by the Departments of Justice, Homeland Security, and State, and the Intelligence Community, and administered by the FBI. The mission to develop the

technical capability for watchlist integration has been underway at the FBI's Foreign Terrorist Tracking Task Force (FTTTF), where TSC operations will be phased in during the coming weeks and operational by December 1, 2003. The TSC was established today by a Presidential directive to the heads of all departments and agencies (Homeland Security Presidential Directive 6, or "HSPD 6"). The Attorney General, the Secretaries of Homeland Security and State, and the Director of Central Intelligence are implementing the directive through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), an unclassified version of which was made available today.

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