



Written by [Daniel Sayani](#) on March 21, 2011

FBI Announces Creation of Biometric Database

The FBI announced last week that its new identification system has reached its initial operating capacity. Known as Next Generation Identification (NGI), the Lockheed Martin-built program serves as an incremental upgrade of the FBI's Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System, or IAFIS — which will revolutionize law enforcement's ability to process fingerprints.



NGI provides automated fingerprint and latent search capabilities, electronic image storage, and electronic exchange of fingerprints to more than 18,000 law enforcement agencies and other authorized criminal justice partners 24/7. Upon completion, the system will have the ability to process fingerprint transactions much more effectively and accurately.

"The implementation announced today represents a tremendous achievement in enhancing our identification services. Already, we're seeing how the NGI system is revolutionizing fingerprint identification in support of our mission," said Louis E. Grever, executive assistant director of the FBI Science and Technology Branch.

"Lockheed Martin was there supporting the FBI when IAFIS went live in 1999, and we're thrilled to be here for NGI today," [affirmed](#) Linda Gooden, executive vice president of Lockheed Martin Information Systems and Global Solutions. "Technology like this is a powerful tool when it comes to protecting America's citizens, and we're proud to serve as a partner in that mission."

"While IAFIS has been effective, criminal and terrorist threats have evolved over the past decade. Today's environment demands faster and more advanced identification capabilities," said Assistant Director Daniel D. Roberts, of the FBI Criminal Justice Information Services Division. "NGI represents a quantum leap in fingerprint identification that will help us in solving investigations, preventing crime, and apprehending criminals and terrorists."

Lockheed Martin, the nation's largest recipient of defense industry contracts, and a leader in the field of biometrics, says that the new technology enhances the FBI's background-check programs by giving investigators expanded and more timely access to fingerprints. They also note that they see the FBI contract as a means by which biometric surveillance can be increased: a press release from the defense contractor states that "[W]hile this meets the challenges of today, tomorrow holds the possibility of developing iris scanners, genetic scanners, and other advanced biometric solutions."

The biometrics company was [awarded](#) the \$1 billion contract to develop the new, enhanced identification system in February 2008. According to Leslie Holoweiko, a Lockheed representative, the company has also received government contracts to open the Biometric Experimentation and Advanced



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Concepts (BEACON™) center in White Hall, W.Va., to serve as a collaborative center in the development of integrated biometrics solutions for both current and future initiatives. She also indicates that the company is the lead systems integrator for the Registered Traveler program led by Verified Identity Pass, Inc. Lockheed is also the lead contractor for the Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC) program, a TSA initiative to protect ports by issuing a biometrically-based credential to vetted workers requiring unescorted access to the ports.

To date, the NGI system is the world's largest biometric database, which the FBI expects to make available to a wide variety of federal, state, and local agencies, all in the name of keeping America safe from terrorists (and illegal immigration). The FBI also intends to retain (upon employer request) the fingerprints of any employee who has undergone a criminal background check, and will inform the employer if the employee is ever arrested or charged with a crime.

The *Washington Post* also [says that](#) the NGI database relies heavily upon real-time (or very nearly real-time) comparisons. This could include general face recognition, specific feature comparison (notable scars, shape of the earlobe, etc.), walking stride, speech patterns, and iris comparisons. To date, facial-recognition technology hasn't exactly reshaped the face of law enforcement.

The increasing use of biometrics for identification is raising questions about the increasing inability of Americans to avoid unwanted scrutiny. It is drawing criticism from those who worry that people's bodies will become de facto national identification cards. Critics say that such government initiatives should not proceed without proof that the technology really can pick a criminal out of a crowd.

The use of biometric data is [increasing](#) throughout the government. For the past two years, the Defense Department has been storing in a database the images of fingerprints, irises, and faces of more than 1.5 million Iraqi and Afghan detainees, Iraqi citizens, and foreigners who need access to U.S. military bases. The Pentagon also collects DNA samples from some Iraqi detainees, which are stored separately.

The Department of Homeland Security has been using iris scans at some airports to verify the identity of travelers who have passed background checks and who want to move through lines quickly. The department is also looking to apply iris- and face-recognition techniques to other programs. The DHS already has a database of millions of sets of fingerprints, which includes records collected from U.S. and foreign travelers stopped at borders for criminal violations, from U.S. citizens adopting children overseas, and from visa applicants abroad. Therefore, there could be multiple records of one person's prints.

"It's going to be an essential component of tracking," warned Barry Steinhardt, director of the Technology and Liberty Project of the American Civil Liberties Union. "It's enabling the Always On Surveillance Society."

Advocates of civil liberties (inspired by John Locke's belief that one's natural rights to life, liberty, and property entail a fundamental right to be free from government intrusions into bodily autonomy) also are concerned that the creation of this biometric database can unconstitutionally infringe on the Fourth Amendment rights of the American people. (*The New American* discussed many of these concerns in a [previous analysis](#) of the DHS's creation of a genetic scanning program, which could easily metastasize into a government DNA database.)

Privacy advocates also are concerned about the ability of people to correct false information. "Unlike say, a credit card number, biometric data is forever," noted Paul Saffo, a Silicon Valley technology forecaster. [He voiced his concern](#) that the FBI, whose computer technology record has been marred by



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expensive failures, could not guarantee the data's security. "If someone steals and spoofs your iris image, you can't just get a new eyeball," explained.

By 2013, the FBI says that it hopes to expand the NGI system to "fuse" fingerprint-, face-, iris-, and palm-matching capabilities into one mega-database, according to Kimberly Del Greco, the FBI's biometric services section chief. In addition, Lawrence Hornak, [director](#) of the West Virginia University Center for Identification Technology Research (CITeR), indicated that the government's goal is "ubiquitous use of biometrics." A traveler may walk down an airport corridor and allow his face and iris images to be captured without ever stepping up to a kiosk and looking into a camera, he said.

For those who champion constitutional rights, this latest milestone represents yet another step in the erosion of natural rights and individual liberties, and a turn toward a more robust, authoritarian police state.



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