The Identity Project

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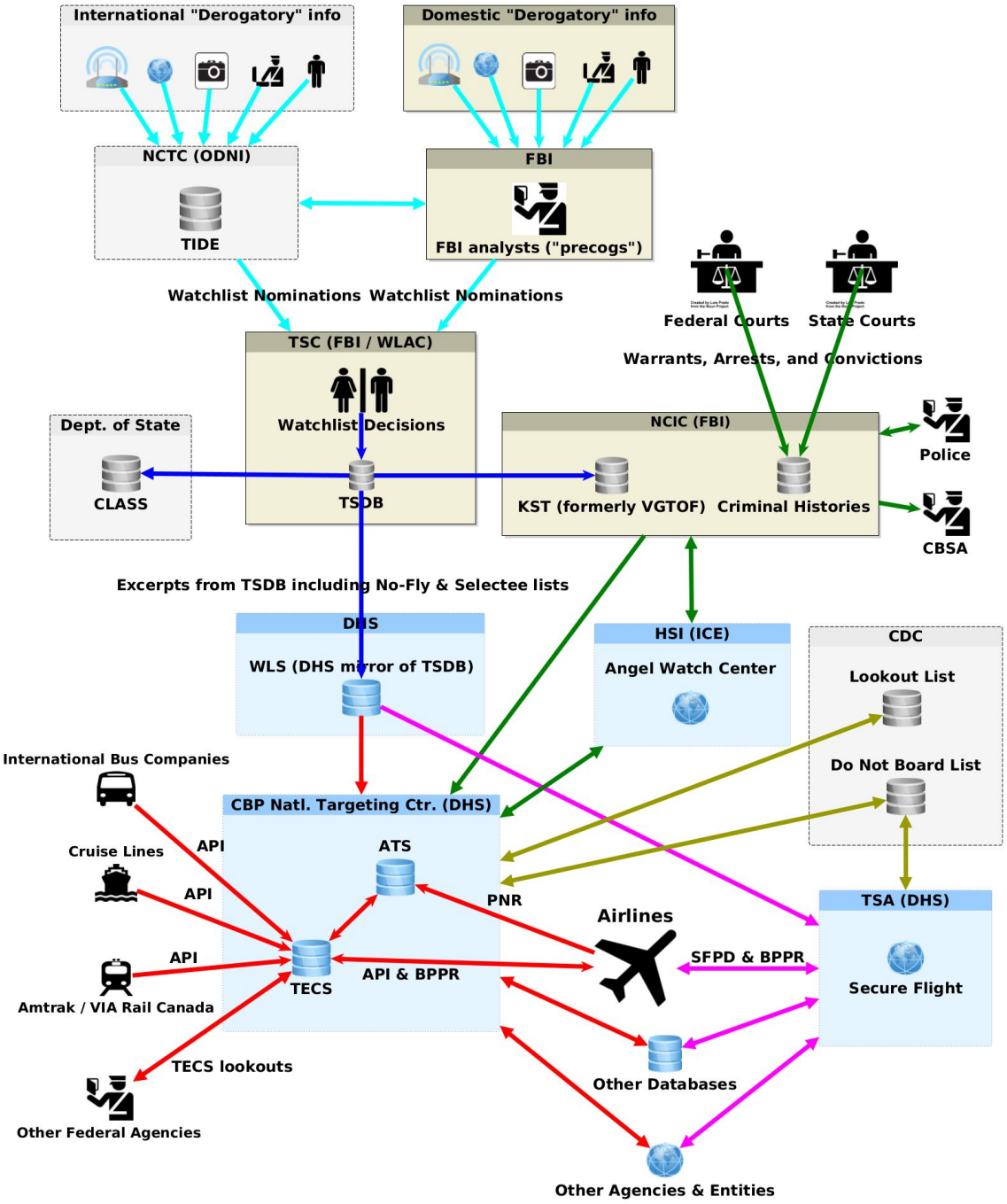

(See the following 2 pages for keys to acronyms and color-coding.)

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Key to Acronyms:

Angel Watch Center: operated by HSI (controls international travel by people who have been convicted of certain sex-related offenses)
API: Advance Passenger Information (transmitted to CBP for international travel)
ATS: Automated Targeting System
BPPR: Boarding Pass Printing Result (fly/no-fly permission message from DHS; can include "handling codes" in addition to yes/no permission for boarding)
CBP: U.S. Customs & Border Protection (component of DHS)
CBSA: Canadian Border Services Agency
CDC: Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (Dept. of Health & Human Svcs.)
CLASS: Consular Lookup and Screening System (Dept. of State)
Do Not Board List: created by CDC (used by TSA in Secure Flight ruleset)

FBI: Federal Bureau of Investigation (component of Dept. of Justice)
HSI: Homeland Security Investigations (component of ICE)
ICE: Immigration and Customs Enforcement (component of DHS)
KST File: Known and Suspected Terrorist File (in NCIC; formerly "VGTOF")

Lookout List: created by CDC (used by CBP in TECS ruleset & lookout system)
NCIC: National Crime Information Center (operated by FBI)
NCTC: National Counterterrorism Center (operated by ODNI)
NTC: National Targeting Center (operated by CBP)
ODNI: Office of the Director of National Intelligence (includes CIA, NSA, etc.)
PNR: Passenger Name Record (transmitted to CBP for international flights)

Secure Flight: TSA database and profiling/scoring system
SFPD: Secure Flight Passenger Data (transmitted to TSA for domestic flights)

TECS: CBP database formerly "Treasury Enforcement Communications System"
TECS Lookout: Flag in TECS set by CBP or other agencies to trigger an alert
TIDE: Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment
TSA: Transportation Security Agency (component of DHS)
TSC: Terrorist Screening Center (multi-agency entity controlled by FBI)
TSDB: Terrorist Screening Database (includes No-Fly & Selectee Lists, etc.)

VGTOF: Violent Gang and Terrorist Offender File (in NCIC; renamed "KST")
WLAC: Watchlisting Advisory Council (inter-departmental entity that controls watchlist/blacklist algorithms including no-fly criteria)
WLS: Watchlist Service (DHS mirror copy of TSDB)

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Key to color-coding of entities and data flows:

Beige boxes: FBI and FBI components (TSC, NCIC, etc.)
Blue boxes: DHS and DHS components (TSA, CBP, ICE, etc.)
Gray boxes: Other U.S. Federal agencies and departments

Light blue lines: "Derogatory" information and watchlist/blacklist "nominations"
Dark blue lines: Watchlisting/blacklisting decisions (including No-Fly orders)

Green lines: Criminal history data including warrants, arrests, and convictions (used for international flights only, not domestic flights, so far as is known)

Brown lines: CDC No-Board orders (to international and domestic airlines)

Red lines: International travel records (to CBP) and orders to airlines
Magenta lines: Domestic U.S. travel records (to TSA) and orders to airlines

This is what we know, as of January 2021, about no-fly decisions by the U.S. government, how they are communicated to airlines, and which agencies are involved:

For domestic U.S. flights, no-fly orders can be derived from either (1) the TSDB No-Fly list or (2) the CDC Do Not Board List. Both of these lists (along with non-list-based suspicion-generating and pre-crime profiling rules) are included in the Secure Flight algorithmic ruleset used by the TSA to generate a "Boarding Pass Printing Result" in response to the transmission of "Secure Flight Passenger Data" by the airline to TSA.

For international flights to, from, via, or overflying the U.S., no-fly orders can be derived from either (1) the TSDB No-Fly list, (2) the CDC Do No Board List and/or Lookout List, or (3) criminal history (including past convictions for sex-related offenses monitored by the "Angel Watch Center") or arrest warrant data from NCIC. All of these, along with pre-crime profiling rules and "handling codes" such as "TECS lookouts," are included in the algorithmic ruleset used by CBP to generate a "Boarding Pass Printing Result" in response to the transmission of API and PNR data by the airline to CBP.

(Latest revision adds Angel Watch Center, CDC Do Not Board and Lookout Lists, and Watchlisting Advisory Council.)