

BY TONY WRIGHT

# Keystroke kops

A powerful Australian-devised computer program could prevent terrorist attacks.

**A**T THE VERY MOMENT A COURT in Jakarta was sentencing Abu Bakir Bashir to 2½ years' jail for his part in the Bali bombings of October 2002, in Canberra, a highly sophisticated computer was convicting the Indonesian cleric of hundreds of terrorist links. The timing was exquisite. A Canberra company named The Distillery had no idea of the date Bashir would be sentenced when it arranged to demonstrate the intelligence-gathering power of its Interquest Analytics apparatus.

It decided to use Bashir and his alleged, suspected and proven links with terrorist organisations simply to demonstrate the power of its invention.

Using only "open-source" information – stories published in newspapers, on the internet, television reports and known movements of the cleric from unclassified data banks – the computer program took micro-seconds to sort through many thousands of possible "hits" before building a compelling picture of a man deeply immersed in the world of terrorist activities. It even translated Indonesian reports into English while dozens of invited guests – many from the Australian intelligence community – watched a giant screen filling rapidly with coloured graphics that connected Bashir with suspect organisations, individuals and locations across the globe.

Those present were left to imagine the result of the exercise if it were placed in the hands of intelligence agencies, which would be able to feed classified material into the mix. In fact, The Distillery's technology is already being used by several Australian and international government agencies, including those charged with national security, although the company won't reveal the details.

The newest director of The Distillery, Ian Buchanan – who until recently was regional chairman of the giant US management and technology consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton, which has close relations with America's

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The Distillery used Abu Bakir Bashir and his network to demonstrate its intelligence software

powerful security agencies – said he believed the small firm was well placed to become a world leader, and possibly *the* world leader, in intelligence analysis and sharing.

Buchanan's belief in The Distillery's Interquest technology – which he is supporting with his own money – places the firm in an enviable position in the queue of international companies seeking recognition in the lucrative field of anti-terrorist enterprises.

Buchanan spends 80% of his time as senior executive adviser with Booz Allen, which makes most of its \$US2.6bn (\$3.29bn) in revenue from advising the key American defence, homeland security and intelligence agencies. Of its 16,000 full-time consultants, more than 6000 have top-secret and above clearances.

Buchanan, as one of Booz Allen's 200 partners, was attending the company's annual partners' meeting in midtown New York when Osama bin Laden's terrorists smashed two hijacked jets into the World Trade towers a few blocks away on 9/11. Soon after, Booz Allen became the key consultancy to the US Commission on National Security, also known as the Hart-Rudman Commission. The company identified 84 separate US intelligence and law-enforcement agencies involved with national security and which, in many ways, failed to share information that may have prevented the attack.

Although Buchanan denies he is involved directly in the intelligence stream – he is a corporate man – he says his mentor is Washington-based Mike McConnell, who

capped his 33-year career as a US naval intelligence officer with a period as director of the immensely powerful National Security Agency before joining Booz Allen as vice-president. McConnell's essential approach is that the US must rethink national security to recognise the threat has moved from "external to internal" and that targets are no longer primarily military, but business infrastructure and people. His view, Buchanan explained, was that the intelligence community had to move from a passive "watch-and-warn" position to a more active approach: to anticipate, penetrate terrorist cells and disrupt them.

According to Buchanan, the Cold War's mantra of "need to know", which effectively quarantined intelligence behind the seams of numerous agencies, leaving it to seep slowly through "back-door" channels, had to change. The new mantra had to become the "need to share". It drew Buchanan to The Distillery.

InterQuest allows diverse information to be sorted automatically and at immense speed to build a picture of a target's movements, links with suspect organisations and individuals, use of documents such as passports, methods of transport, use of communications and interest or involvement in events.

Such a picture, properly analysed, could be used to anticipate a terrorist attack or to allow a terrorist organisation to be disrupted before it could attack. Indeed, such a picture might have sent Abu Bakir Bashir to the slammer for much longer and it may have prevented the Bali bombings in the first place. ●

