

# FBI counterpunches IT criticism

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Created *09/06/2005 - 3:38am*

Submitted by srlinuxx on Thursday 9th of June 2005 03:38:03 AM Filed under [Misc](#) [1]

Apparently stung by criticism of its IT projects old and new, the FBI today denied charges leveled in the press and by congressional investigators about the conduct of its Virtual Case File and Sentinel projects.

CIO Zalmi Azmi cited the "inaccuracy of a news report in U.S. News and World Report" that pegged the price of the Sentinel IT overhaul project at \$800 million. "There is no \$800 million project in the FBI," Azmi said. A barbed exchange between Azmi and a reporter followed, during which Azmi repeatedly denied detailed inquiries about meetings reportedly concerning the Sentinel budget.

Azmi also denied a Washington Post report, based on statements in a House Appropriations Committee staff investigation, that the FBI had withheld from VCF contractor Science Applications International Corp. details of 400 alleged problems the bureau found in the defunct case management system.

In addition, he rejected the congressional investigation's allegations that FBI officials were "scrambling" to prepare the Sentinel project and that bureau officials early this year had chose to pilot a version of VCF for political rather than technical reasons.

GCN reported earlier, and Azmi confirmed today, that FBI officials had met with SAIC officials last spring to discuss the 400 issues the bureau had with VCF at the time. SAIC contended that the 400 issues comprised change requests, not problems with the vendor's software work.

Azmi touted the effectiveness of the bureau's IT organization and the stability of its management. He cited the FBI's progress in other phases of its Trilogy IT makeover, including building out three wide area networks and equipping tens of thousands of users with desktops.

As for Sentinel, Azmi said it would proceed to an industry day later this month, a proposal request in July, 40 calendar days for vendors to prepare proposals and a contract award by December.

Azmi also said the FBI has recruited a program manager for the Sentinel project from the CIA. Miodrag "Mio" Lazarevich will start June 13. His most recent CIA job has been deputy director of the special communications program in the agency's CIO office. Lazarevich earned a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from the University of Wisconsin at Madison and a master's degree in electrical engineering from the University of Arizona at Tuscon.

Azmi said Lazarevich has managed programs larger than the Sentinel project. The CIA official is on a two-year detail assignment to the bureau, which may be renewed for a third year.

The FBI learned a lot from the VCF project and is determined to avoid the mistakes that led to its downfall, Azmi said. For example, the bureau will roll out Sentinel in stages over a 40 to 43 month period, and use earned value management to keep tabs on its contractors' activities he said. The bureau currently plans a four-phase rollout for Sentinel, but the project's vendor could propose an alternate schedule, Azmi said.

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