

Bloomberg's NYPD spying on Muslims gets OK from citizens: 'Islamophobia' still present

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BY YURI RESETOVS

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COMMENTARY



10 House Democrats are unhappy with New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg's unprofessional response to the criticism of New York Police Department's secret spying program. The letter of concern was signed by Rep. Rush Hold (D-NJ), Rep. Keith Ellison (D-Minn), the first Muslim elected to Congress, Rep. Mike Honda (D-Calif), who compared the secret surveillance to the WWII policy that sent him and his family to an internment camp, and seven other lawmakers.

In a March 22 letter to the Mayor, member of Congress called for an end to NYPD's surveillance on New Jersey grounds. The Lawmakers said they were troubled by the tactics and the city's response to concerns, as reported by the Associated Press in the Washington Post.

Bloomberg has defended his department's actions as lawful and necessary to keep the city safe, often ignoring lawmakers, community leaders, and civil rights groups who find the activities and conduct

"underhanded and unprofessional."

Mayor Bloomberg is not new to criticism of using his power, once saying, "I have my own army in the NYPD, which is the seventh biggest army in the world," during a late November speech at MIT. The remark was a response to Occupy Wall Street's protests, which are still at large and committed, especially now that warm spring weather is just around the corner.

"Occupy Wall Street has stripped away much of his independent facade and exposed him as an enabling engineer of our current political and economic misery, as well as a controversial civil-rights offender with a taste for panoptic totalitarianism. Which does not bode well for what *The Atlantic* called last September 'not just [a] mayor, but also effectively the head of a de facto city-state,'" writes muckraker Scott Thill for the Huffington Post.

Despite the criticism from lawmakers, citizens tend to agree with the surveillance in their state. A recent Rutgers-Eagleton poll of 601 adults found that 47 percent of voters agreed that the monitoring of Muslims living in the region was necessary to protect the country. 32 percent was against the notion while 12 percent noted that it was necessary despite violating civil liberties. The secret monitoring started sometime in the beginning of 2006.

In Hudson and Essex counties (with Jersey City and Newark as largest cities, respectively), where the monitoring was conducted, 37 percent were in favor of the monitoring while 44 percent were against, citing a violation of civil liberties.

The survey has a margin of error of plus or minus four percentage points.

In an independent poll conducted by the Quinnipiac University Polling Institute three weeks ago, New York City voters gave a majority of support to the surveillance effort, 58 percent believing that the NYPD has dealt with the Muslims appropriately, while only 29 percent thought that police unfairly targeted Muslim groups. 964 city voters were polled, with a 3.2 percent margin of error.

It was roughly a month ago that New Jersey Governor Chris Christie was furious with the New York City Police Department for their spy tactics, describing them as arrogant, selfish, provincial and paranoid behavior; the NYPD didn't notify New Jersey officials about the surveillance. The Governor thought that the NYPD was over-stepping their jurisdiction by spying on NJ's Muslims, which included educational institutions (such as Rutgers in New Brunswick and Newark), Muslim student groups and organizations, Muslim businesses, and mosques.

The NYPD used informants and undercover agents in Muslim neighborhoods as "listening posts" in mosques and businesses in New York and New Jersey, detailing their surveillance, noting where Muslims ate, drank, and prayed. The techniques and technology involved are typically reserved for criminal investigations; there was no mention of criminal activity.

Perhaps as a result of 9/11, the term "Islamophobia" has become more widespread since its inception in the late 1980s or early 1990s, and we can infer from these recent polls that giving up other people's liberties for the safety of our own is a sound security measure. This teaches us that it's okay to give up certain civil liberties as long as it happens to *them* and not *us*.

"Islamophobia is also a violation of essential Western values: tolerance, liberalism and egalitarianism. Founded on fear and ignorance, it also flies in the face of Western rationalism. We have created a global market in which, whether we like it or not, we're interconnected as never before. If we want a peaceful, stable and sustainable world, we have to learn to live with those we instinctively regard as 'other,'" writes Karen Armstrong for the *Globe and Mail*.

"Those who can give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety."

This motto is attributed to Benjamin Franklin, an author, politician, scientist and inventor, diplomat, and a Founding Father of the United States. Becoming the prominent face of the \$100 bill, Franklin was a signer of both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and leaving him out of the American history book would leave many pages bare.

And if he were alive today, if somehow his spirit came to visit what's become of the country that he was so prominent in establishing, he would be devastated. Though he lived in a much different time, having died almost 225 years ago, there are certain principles that he believed in and would never compromise on. He, like many today, was a man whose ideas and principles were etched from reason.

One can argue that Franklin did not know of the dangers of today's world, but he did know that it is with fear that citizens would willingly give up their liberties as they have. At least there are still lawmakers willing to stand up for the rights that they swore to defend. It seems that time is not a factor to these simple ideas, as those who are willing to give up each other's liberty to obtain their own temporary safety are only digging their own graves.



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Comments (5)

Dear Franklin, 5. Wednesday, 04 April 2012 13:33
karenrz

From my reading of these events, the muslims who were observed did not even know they were being observed.

Like I said, if you're not doing anything wrong, then why be concerned?

LUNACY 4. Wednesday, 04 April 2012 13:30
(FranklinManolo)

Karen comments that No one's civil liberties were violated in this surveillance by the NYPD.

Perhaps non-muslims cannot fully appreciate what it feels like to be 'stalked' by the police without any probable cause. Probable cause is clearly defined in the realm of law enforcement, and is the sacred basis for allowing police the legal ability to spend tax payer dollars to surveil you. When a police officer decides to surveill you without probable cause, it is no longer surveillance, it is stalking. Have you ever had some stranger stalk you? I can tell you this much. If you woke up every morning and left your house, and noticed someone watching you everyday, it would make you nervous, paranoid and cause other psychological stress, even if the person never once approached you. In most cases, it is pretty much completely legal for me to go and follow you around every day, follow you to work, follow you home, follow you everywhere you go. As long as I dont harm you, touch you, approach you or commit any violation of the law, I am legal in my actions, but even though this may be the case, it would still bother you to see me parked outside your home every single day, waiting for you to leave your home so I could follow you around everywhere you went. The media,press,paparazzi do this almost all the time when they stalk people for a story, chase celebrities, camp outside their homes and stuff like that, and what they do is considered legal at the moment (even though it shouldnt be). The problem is that the subject of such stalking generally does not feel comfortable with it. It causes stress, mental anguish and other effects upon people to know that a bunch of strangers that you never met are chasing you around and following your every move. So the NYPD have turned themselves into islamic paparazzi, and citizens are being forced to support this activity with their tax dollars. How is this not a violation of civil liberties? If a person wants to go to a mosque just because they want to spy on people, they have the right to do it, but the state should not be paying you to do it. If the NYPD is so concerned about terrorism that they feel an overwhelming need to stalk muslims, then by all means they can do it, but do it on your own dime and without being paid for it. Once you are on the clock and being paid to be a police officer, then the rules have already been established that on-duty police officers can only be allocated to spy upon people when probable cause to believe a crime will be committed exists. So perhaps it does not bother you to be stalked all day long by complete strangers that are monitoring your every move, but it does bother many other people, and it is in fact a violation of civil liberties when the state is paying people to do this. If an off duty-cop wants to go to a mosque to keep on eye on people because he is suspicious of them, then as a concerned citizen you are fully within your rights to volunteer to do this at your own expense, and only if you happen to discover probable cause that a crime exists, can you then provide your evidence to the police to initiate a lawful investigation to be paid for with taxpayer money.

LUNACY 3. Wednesday, 04 April 2012 13:28
(FranklinManolo)

Karen writes "No one's civil liberties were violated in this surveillance by the NYPD"

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LUNACY

2. Wednesday, 04 April 2012 09:54
(FranklinManolo)

Its pretty simple. If the NYPD sends a mole into a Mosque without any probable cause, then they must compensate for that activity by also sending a mole into a Church, Synagogue, Temple, and any other religious establishment, just so that they do not discriminate. Bloomberg would respond to this by saying "Christans and Jews did not attack us on 911, so we dont want to waste our money just to be fair to muslims by spying on christians and jews when they do not pose a threat."

So if the NYPD position is that only muslims pose a terrorist threat to the citizens of NY, then they are forgetting the history of organized crime in NY. Organized crime has killed more people in New York than 911, and the majority of organized crime is committed by Black, White, Spanish ethnicities. The death toll from Arabic organized crime (such as that which was committed on 911) is far smaller than the death toll from organized crime by other ethnicities in NY. The NYPD doesnt send moles into Italian neighborhoods even though the Italian mafia has itself killed more people in NY than the death toll on 911. Additionally, people that say 'all Italians are in the mafia' are bigots. So people like Bloomberg, who are essentially attempting to say that 'all muslims' pose a threat to NY, are also bigots.

NYPD, before you start sending moles into muslim neighborhoods looking for potential criminals without any probable cause, perhaps you should instead spend that money to go back and analyse all the 'cold' homicide investigations where no one was arrested. You have plenty of murderers roaming free in New York because they have never been arrested for their crimes, and I am pretty sure that they are not all hiding out in mosques waiting to be discovered by your spies.

"Islamophobia" =/= concentration camps

1. Wednesday, 04 April 2012 09:05
karenrz

No one's civil liberties were violated in this surveillance by the NYPD. It's not as if the Muslim students were prevented from gathering or inhibited in conducting their lives.

What is ridiculous about this surveillance ruckus is if someone that was being watched had any indication of being involved in a terrorist plot, and the NYPD caught them in the act, we'd be applauding the NYPD for catching the SOB.

The "spying" that the authorities are conducting has caught people planning terrorist acts, and lucky that some of the terrorists just were ineffective and their bombs didn't work. Do we have to actually wait for another successful attack that takes out a bunch of US citizens before we revert back to protecting ourselves?

If it looks like a duck, smells like a duck, quacks like a duck, poops like a duck, and tastes like a duck - it's a duck. If someone is acting like a terrorist, he'll be caught. If someone is not acting like a terrorist, that person has nothing to fear.

Comments (2)

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