

Should the New York Security Police Be Called Off?  
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Several reporters have received the Pulitzer Prize for journalism for their investigation of the New York Police Department \223spying\224 on Muslim communities. These reporters claim Muslims are being \223unfairly profiled\224 and their privacy violated. Should we make the police stop their spying? Do we want no profiling at all, in the name of \223fairness?\224

The first duty of all government is to protect people from violence and criminal activity. Most of us, even those champions of gun rights, cannot protect all of us. However, in a democratic society, we assign police and (for overseas) the CIA to deal with the darker aspects of human nature. Civil rights laws are there to protect us from undue zealotry in going after lawbreakers. But war has been declared against us, and we cannot afford to turn a blind eye.

So what is the issue in New York? On 9/11/01, New York and Washington DC were attacked by Islamist terrorist suicide operatives sent by Osama bin Laden\222s al-Qaeda to \223create terror in our hearts.\224 New York police have plenty of experience in protecting the United Nations and its many diplomats, and have been efficient in protecting parades and demonstrations, but they were sadly out of touch with the Islamist threats. The problem was: how much of this protection should be domestic (police) and how much should be national (FBI) and should the FBI be privy to what the CIA (international) knows? They had not worked this out when the World Trade Center was hit, although this was the second attack on that structure, the first being 1993. It seems nothing had been learned.

Our protectors scrambled to fix this hole in our intelligence. Police usually act only after a criminal attack, not before. But now, the public (and Congress) demand that they act beforehand\227which is what the Patriot Act was designed to address. They have not only done that, but have been so effective that despite numerous serious attempts to replicate 9/11 by a range of Islamist operatives (some of them home grown), we have not had another serious successful assault on their key target, New York. We have only had several American-born Islamists do solo acts, such as murdering fellow US soldiers.

But one attack that had serious potential for New York almost happened. Now, in a federal trial, we hear from terrorist Najibullah Zazi, an Afghan-born American, that he planned to detonate backpack bombs on the nation's busiest mass transit system and car-bomb Times Square. Trained at an Al Qaeda camp in Pakistan, Zazi was caught only because he sent an unwise e-mail to his trainer, someone whom the Feds were watching. His plot was not a lone wolf attack; it was organized with other suicide bombers who came close to doing major mayhem in New York. His plot failed because of the vigilance of a street vendor in Times Square, vigilance of the police, and stupidity of Zazi. Who would have been blamed had this plot succeeded?

The outraged civil libertarians (and journalists) hate having police spy on mosques, Muslim student clubs at universities, and the no-fly lists. But where else should they be looking for trouble if not there? If a man changes his name from Mohammad to Mike, or from Mike to Mohammad, such a name change may be innocent, but when officially changed, this means changing a passport. Was this name change done to hide a Muslim identity from the no-fly list\227or does it signal a new convert to Islam, someone who should be watched? And shouldn\222t we red-flag young men who take many trips to and from Yemen or Pakistan to \223learn Arabic\224 or \223bring back a wife?\224 Will we have another underwear bomber who will succeed this time?

If the police are forced to give up their intelligence activities, who will be blamed when the next attack comes? Everyone in authority says it is only a matter of time that one terror attack could succeed. When that happens, where will the \223investigative journalists\224 hide?

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