

# **New York police defend illegal spying operation against Muslims**

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Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly vigorously defended the New York City Police Department's (NYPD) illegal spying operation against Muslims on Monday, the same day the Associated Press reported that the surveillance program was partly funded by White House money diverted from an anti-drug trafficking program.

Kelly's strident defense of the operation came a week after an AP report uncovered how the NYPD's intelligence unit focused far beyond New York City as part of its surveillance program directed against Muslim-Americans and Muslim immigrants. The commissioner has refused to apologize and has criticized calling the program "spying."

"Not everybody is going to be happy with everything the police department does," said Kelly. "But our primary goal is to keep this city safe and save lives and that's what we're doing." The commissioner invoked the 1993 World Trade Center attack in order to make the case for ethnic profiling. "It should have been a major wakeup call for the country and the city. It wasn't," he said. "It was sort of written off as being an inept group of individuals. It wasn't seen to be tied to an international movement. We paid a price for a lack of vigilance."

On February 18, an AP report revealed that the NYPD was monitoring Muslim student groups at 16 college campuses across the Northeast in 2006 and 2007. The report described how undercover police officers monitored web sites run by Muslim student groups and kept tabs on Muslim scholars.

"Police trawled daily through student web sites run by Muslim student groups at Yale, the University of Pennsylvania, Rutgers and 13 other colleges in the Northeast," states the report. "They talked with local authorities about professors in Buffalo and even sent an

undercover agent on a whitewater rafting trip, where he recorded students' names and noted in police intelligence files how many times they prayed."

While Kelly and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg have claimed that the police only follow legitimate leads about suspected criminal activity, the documents released by AP mention no wrongdoing by any of the students. Many students have had their names included in police reports simply for belonging to groups like the Muslim Students Association.

Last week, the AP also released a 60-page NYPD report containing photographs and notes about every mosque and Muslim-owned business in Newark, New Jersey. The information was collected by undercover police officers in 2007. The report showed how the NYPD targeted mosques in New Jersey's largest city using tactics usually reserved for criminal organizations, with police documenting the license plates of worshippers, monitoring them on surveillance cameras, and sending informants to spy on Muslim sermons.

On Monday, it was revealed that the NYPD spent millions of dollars in White House grants to help pay for its surveillance of Muslim communities. Since the 9/11 attacks, \$135 million in funds were made available to the New York and New Jersey regions by the Bush and Obama administrations through the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) program. According to the AP, some of the money was spent on the cars used by undercover officers to spy on Muslims and on computers used by the NYPD to store information about innocent Muslim students.

The Obama administration has refused to repudiate the program, claiming it has no control over how the NYPD spends the money. White House spokesperson Jay Carney said Monday that the White House has no

opinion on the matter. Last year, John Brennan, Obama's top counterterrorism advisor, called the NYPD's efforts "heroic." Other administration officials such as Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano have refused to discuss police tactics or the NYPD.

The American Civil Liberties Union and the Council on American-Islamic Relations have separately called for investigations into White House funding for the spying operation.

The AP first revealed the existence of the NYPD's illegal spying operation last August. The surveillance was carried out in collaboration with the CIA, which is barred from conducting domestic law enforcement. The latest revelations have sparked outrage in Muslim communities throughout New York and Jersey. They follow the news that the NYPD screened a vicious anti-Muslim film for nearly 1,500 police officers in 2010. Commissioner Kelly, who provided a lengthy interview for the film, refused to resign amid mounting criticism from Muslim groups and civil rights advocates.

Students across New York City have expressed anger over the NYPD's spying on Muslim students. "If this is happening to innocent Muslim students, who's next?" Dina Morris, a freshman at Columbia University told the Associated Press. "I'm the child of an immigrant, and I was just blown away by the news; it's disgusting."

Jawad Rasul, a Muslim student at the City College of New York, described the fear he now lives under since finding out that his name was included in a police report after the NYPD sent an informant to spy on a rafting trip he had attended with other members of the Muslim Students Association.

"I can't trust anybody, I don't know who around me is doing what," he told the NY1 television news station. "What we have seen in many cases is that a lot of these undercover agents, they were not just simply watching. Anytime they saw that someone had a habit of talking, of being outspoken, they started instigating things and that takes this spying to a whole different level."

The NYPD, staunchly backed by Mayor Bloomberg, has repeatedly defended the spying operation and has pledged to continue it. Last week, Bloomberg described the operation as "legal," "appropriate" and "constitutional." He added that investigators must pursue "leads and threats wherever they come from,"

even across state lines.

Moreover, the spying operation has received support from across the New York City political establishment. While Democratic mayoral candidates such as Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer have made some limited criticisms of the surveillance policy, neither he nor any of the other likely candidates have called for an end to the spying. New York City Comptroller and likely Democratic mayoral candidate John Liu made a perfunctory remark against profiling, but praised the "dedicated men and women of the NYPD" for doing "an extraordinary job of keeping New Yorkers safe."

Democratic New York City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, another likely mayoral candidate in 2013, has come out in full support of the surveillance program. "Unless we know that laws were broken or someone's civil liberties were violated, I do not think the NYPD should stop the practice," she said on Monday.



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