

Senate Report: “Fusion Centers” Meant to “Combat Terrorism” Spy on U.S. Citizens

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A Senate [subcommittee report](#) on so-called “fusion centers” meant to combat terrorism has found that they produce little of value, are used to spy on U.S. citizens—particularly Muslims—and endanger civil liberties. The Senate committee that released the report spent two years conducting an exhaustive investigation of federal support for fusion centers, which are information centers where local, state and federal law enforcement authorities work together with the goal of preventing terrorism. But the report found that the federal government, which has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on the centers, misled the public about the efficacy of the fusion centers. 77 such centers, created in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, exist across the country. A spokesman for Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano blasted the Senate subcommittee report as “out of date, inaccurate and misleading,” [according to NBC News](#).

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) responded to the Senate report with a call for “hearings to investigate rampant civil liberties violations in the fusion centers funded by the Department of Homeland Security.”

Most alarming are the instances of spying on U.S. citizens that were reported on by the fusion centers and reports that the Department of Homeland Security stored information on U.S. citizens in potential violation of the Privacy Act. Homeland Security officials quoted in the report dismissed much of the work fusion centers do as useless.

“It’s long been known to us that fear of Islam unfortunately drives too much of our security thinking to the point where, unfortunately, too many officials are willing to sacrifice liberty at the altar of fear,” said Corey Saylor, legislative director for the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR).

In one instance, a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) official drafted a report on “a list of reading suggestions by a Muslim community group, ‘Ten Book Recommendations for Every Muslim.’ The report noted that four of the titles were authored by individuals with records in a U.S. intelligence counterterrorism database, the Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment (TIDE).” The report was never published due to concerns that it would violate civil liberties.

Another instance chronicled in the subcommittee report found that “one DHS intelligence officer filed a draft HIR [Homeland Intelligence Reports] about a U.S. citizen who was appearing at a Muslim organization to deliver a day-long motivational talk and a lecture on positive parenting.” In response to the draft of that report, the DHS Office of General Counsel wrote, “Intelligence personnel are not authorized to collect information regarding USPERs [U.S. persons] solely for the purpose of monitoring activities protected by the U.S.

Constitution.” The report was canceled.

Yet another canceled draft report monitored “a U.S. citizen visiting and giving a lecture at a mosque. The draft contained no derogatory information on the speaker, or the mosque, although it noted that the speaker was once the head of a U.S. Islamic school that had a record in the TIDE database.”

In all, 40 reports drafted by DHS personnel were cancelled “after reviewers raised concerns the documents potentially endangered the civil liberties or legal privacy protections of the U.S. persons they mentioned.”

“Law enforcement has long abused its perceived intelligence authorities to spy on people because of their beliefs and political activities rather than evidence of wrongdoing, and the subcommittee report confirms that this problem continues today,” Hina Shamsi, director of the ACLU’s national security project, said in a statement.

The Senate report confirms many of the concerns the ACLU has been raising about fusion centers for years. Fusion centers “can employ officials from federal, state and local law enforcement and homeland security agencies, as well as other state and local government entities, the federal intelligence community, the military and even private companies, to spy on Americans in virtually complete secrecy,” the [ACLU noted in 2007](#).

It’s also not the first time fusion centers were caught spying on American Muslims. It was [revealed in 2009](#) that a fusion center in Texas published a bulletin stating that it was “imperative” to monitor “the activities of lobbying groups, Muslim civil rights organizations and anti-war protest groups in their areas.” The bulletin ([pdf here](#)) reported on the activities of the Council on American Islamic Relations, and warned that “Middle Eastern Terrorist groups and their supporting organizations have been successful in gaining support for Islamic goals in the United States and providing an environment for terrorist organizations to flourish.” No proof was offered to tie CAIR to terrorism in the report. Some of the sources the fusion center used to warn of threats from Muslim groups came from right-wing, anti-Muslim websites like David Horowitz’s Front Page Magazine.

“This report shows the consequences of fear-driven security rather than substantive-driven security,” said CAIR’s Saylor. “The fusion centers are doing an amateurish job and this report should be a wake-up call to them that if their goal is to defend liberty in the United States, they need to professionalize their operations.”

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