



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on September 22, 2010

Feds Slammed for Spying on Anti-war Groups, Lying

A report by the Justice Department's Inspector General blasted the Federal Bureau of Investigation for lying and spying on anti-war activists, animal-rights groups, and environmentalists, calling the improper "terror" investigations "unreasonable and inconsistent with FBI policy."

Among those targeted were the anti-war Thomas Merton Center, the Religious Society of Friends (the Quakers), the Catholic Worker, Greenpeace, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), and an individual Quaker peace activist. According to the Inspector General, there was "little or no basis" for the investigations.



The phony probes resulted in innocent people being placed on the infamous "terror watch list" and in FBI boss Robert Muller providing "inaccurate and misleading information" to Congress, the report stated. The amount of tax money wasted, while not specifically addressed in the report, must have been enormous. Numerous policies were also violated by the FBI, and Inspector General Glenn Fine called the FBI's tactics "troubling."

The Inspector General's office reviewed 8,000 pages of FBI documents from 2001 to 2006 related to the groups to determine whether the investigations were proper, were initiated owing to protected First Amendment activities, and for several other purposes. "From this broad review we identified particular FBI investigations and other activities that potentially implicated the First Amendment activities of the groups or their members," explained the report, entitled "[A Review of the FBI's Investigations of Certain Domestic Advocacy Groups](#)."

The report concluded that, while the FBI probes were not generally predicated simply on the views of the targets, at least one FBI field office was focused on a group "as a result of its anti-war views." It also found that "FBI agents and supervisors sometimes provided the [Office of the Inspector General] with speculative, after-the-fact rationalizations for their prior decisions to open investigations that we did not find persuasive." The bureau also classified some activities like trespassing or vandalism as terrorism. Whether there will be repercussions is unclear so far.

The Inspector General's report made six recommendations: Address the false or misleading statements made to Congress and the public, including the possibility of taking action against the agents involved; keep better track of the sources of supposed facts; require the identification of a potential violation of federal statute prior to opening investigations; review guidelines to consider reinstating the prohibition on retention of irrelevant First Amendment material; develop a better classification to determine when First Amendment cases should be classified as "terrorism"; and, finally, investigate the FBI's Pittsburgh field office "to assess the Division's compliance with applicable statutes, Attorney General's Guidelines, and FBI policies involving First Amendment issues."

An FBI spokesman said the bureau was pleased that the report concluded the investigations were not



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started as a result of First Amendment activities, but that disciplinary action against certain individuals was being considered. But the groups that were targeted expressed outrage. "The use of McCarthyite tactics against PETA and other groups that speak out against cruelty to animals and exploitative corporate and government practices is un-American, unconstitutional, and against the interests of a healthy democracy," PETA said in a statement.

A spokesperson for the organization told [ABC](#), "PETA's effective activism scare [sic] well-heeled business interests that abuse animals, but when these outfits used their connections to violate the U.S. Constitution, the FBI's ham-handed attempt to catch us with our pants down backfired. As a result, the FBI was caught with its pants down."

The pacifist Thomas Merton Center was also quoted throughout the media. "It's kind of mind-blowing and perplexing to me that the FBI would target a peace and justice center that focuses on non-violence, in the name of terrorism. We hope that this story will strengthen the peace movement," President Michael Drohan told ABC.

In a separate interview with the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Drohan said, "To mention us in the same sentence as 'terrorism' is an outrage. Everything we do and have done is to stop war, prevent war and promote economic and social justice. They really owe the Merton Center a profound apology for incriminating us."

In a statement posted on its [website](#), Greenpeace applauded the Justice Department's report and condemned the FBI. "Greenpeace appreciates the steps taken by the Office of the Inspector General to illuminate the nature of these improper investigations. But, it's troubling that the FBI has been targeting peaceful protest, when our government should be supporting public participation, dissent, and First Amendment rights."

The American Civil Liberties Union, which helped spark the Inspector General's investigation when it released documents obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request, also blasted the FBI and called for more safeguards. It said the report proved the bureau "improperly spied on American activists involved in First Amendment-protected activities and mischaracterized nonviolent civil disobedience as terrorism."

The FBI "has a long history of abusing its national security surveillance powers," ACLU policy counsel Michael German told *AFP*. "We are all in danger of being spied on and added to terrorist watch lists for doing nothing more than attending a rally or holding up a sign." And of course, this is not the first time the FBI has found itself in hot water for its spying activities.

A separate Justice Department investigation released earlier this year concluded that the bureau used lies and trickery to illegally obtain thousands of records, then issued after-the-fact approvals in an attempt to cover it up. That report claimed agents repeatedly and knowingly violated the law by invoking non-existent "terror emergencies" to get access to information they were not authorized to have. And among those targeted were journalists.

While most of those targeted in the FBI investigations discussed in the most recent report would probably be considered left of center, the federal government has also been stepping up its efforts against so-called "right-wing extremists." These supposed extremists, according to a Department of Homeland Security [document](#) leaked last year, include veterans, pro-lifers, and individuals opposed to gun confiscation, a "New World Order," illegal immigration, and other issues. And they are the "most dangerous domestic terrorism threat in the United States," according to the DHS threat assessment.



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