

AIR NATIONAL GUARD WILL DEPLOY DRONES TO SPY ON BLACK BEARS IN ADIRONDACK PARK

✖ As part of what they bill as a “military training program,” the Air Force National Guard will deploy a bunch of MQ-9 Reaper drones over the Adirondacks park in Northern NY. (h/t Tim Shorrock)

The Air Force Air National Guard will fly remotely piloted planes over the Adirondacks starting next June.

Crews at ground control stations fly the unmanned aircraft, the MQ-9 Reaper, from both line-of-sight locations and by satellite.

Col. Charles “Spider” Dorsey, vice commander of the 174th Fighter Wing based at Fort Drum, presented details of the new military training program to Adirondack Park Agency commissioners Thursday.

[snip]

It is used for intelligence-gathering details, Dorsey explained, and also for combat search and rescue or simulated attacks.

The Department of Defense prohibits target surveillance of U.S. citizens by intelligence systems,” the colonel said, to deflect concern about any intrusion from the sorties.

[snip]

The MQ-9 is used by the Army, Navy and U.S. Border Patrol, primarily along the

■ southern border, Dorsey said.

Now, Colonel “Spider” Dorsey admits that this drone is used to collect intelligence. But don’t you worry, he says, because DOD prohibits “target surveillance” of US citizens by intelligence systems. I’m not sure precisely what he means by “target surveillance,” but as the NSA’s mission makes clear, DOD does not prohibit surveillance of US citizens by intelligence systems, at least within some parameters.

Moreover, as the use of these drones by Border Patrol makes clear, the US government does use these drones to surveil humans in the US. The legal basis for doing so would **generally** restrict its use to border areas. But as it happens, the Adirondacks are pretty damn close to an international border, and Fort Drum is even closer to that border. So the US government could very easily start flying “border patrol” missions out of Fort Drum with this drone and—given that DOD had publicly announced its use for “training missions” in the Adirondacks—no one on the ground would know any different. Particularly not given that—as “Spider” boasts—these are designed to be silent. And since this is a medium-to-high altitude drone, with a top flying altitude of 50,000 feet, those “black bears” on the ground “in the Adirondacks” wouldn’t see the damn thing, either.

Mind you, the Adirondacks are really not all that far from all the major population centers in the Northeast; both Boston and NYC would easily fall within its 1,150 mile range. So if this silent, high flying intelligence drone just happened to collect information from people in either one of those cities, under the legal cover of a border-related mission, we would have no way of knowing. Particularly given that the Air Force specifically prohibits anyone cleared into its Special Access Programs from talking to Congress about them.

But don't you worry. Spider tells us we have nothing to worry about. Honest, I'm sure they're just spying on the black bears that live in the park.