

NYPD'S FEARMONGERS ARE ARGUING IT'S MORE USEFUL TO SPY ON 2ND GRADERS THAN DISRUPT REAL PLOTS

Chuck Schumer, the NYDN, and the NYPost keep up their attacks on the AP's exposure of the NYPD's spying program. Increasingly, NYPD's fearmongers are getting cornered on the question of efficacy.

Schumer, rarely a courageous man, made full use of the passive when he tried to claim everyone knew the spying program makes NY safer.

There is nothing wrong with the NYPD collecting and assessing publicly available information from New York, New Jersey, the other 48 states or around the world in the effort to prevent another terror attack like 9/11. In fact, it is widely understood that the NYPD's actions have kept us safer. Looking at public information and following leads is perfectly acceptable as long as any one group, in its entirety, is not targeted based only on its religious or ethnic affiliation. [my emphasis]

Nevermind that the NYPD uses techniques—like informants and permanent cameras—that aren't exactly available to the public. Nevermind that Schumer's backing himself into a corner with his new caveat that profiling is okay so long as not the entire ethnic group is profiled (though arguably, they are).

Schumer proves unable to say, in the affirmative, that he knows this makes NY safer. And he ought to consider that question seriously.

More offensive is the NYPost's insinuation that the AP is just in this for a Pulitzer.

Columbia is also where they keep the Pulitzers in the off-season; American journalism's most treasured self-affirmation program is more or less run from the university's J-school. Since the awards are soon to be presented, and since the AP's lust for one is almost comically transparent, its show-the-flag campus visit is wholly unsurprising.

[snip]

Strip away the emotive rhetoric and what's left is a series of stories over several weeks that show pretty clearly that the NYPD works very hard to keep the city safe – operating an aggressive and imaginative program, but staying well within both the law and the bounds of post-9/11 propriety from beginning to end.

Perspective matters.

At least twice in the decade before the NYPD program began, Islamist sleeper agents attacked New York City. The first time, six people died; the second, thousands.

Since then, the department has disrupted a number of Islamist-initiated plots; there is no way of telling how many more were never undertaken because the city is so aggressively anti-terrorist. And there have been no terror-related fatalities since 9/11.

That could change tomorrow – presumably the AP's Pulitzer prospects would tail off sharply if it did – but that would prove only that there are no guarantees in counterterrorism.

Here, the NYPost is just flat out wrong—or should be.

If there were a terrorist attack tomorrow, the inevitable commission would finally give the NYPD spying program the scrutiny it needs, scrutiny which the AP has tried to offer. And that commission will discover that the NYPD has spent its time spying on girls' and grade schools, hunting out Muslims at Jewish businesses, scamming whitewater rafting trips off of taxpayers.

Sure, such efforts have led to hyped busts of folks it took 31 months for the NYPD to coach how to drill holes into a pipe. Such busts only discredit Mayor Bloomberg, Ray Kelly, and ultimately everyone defending this program.

What those efforts didn't find were the real terrorist attacks. They didn't find Najibullah Zazi and they didn't find Faisal Shahzad—even though both were right under their nose. As the AP reported in December, the NYPD had both the mosque where Najibullah Zazi prayed and the Muslim Students Association where his accomplice, Adis Medunjanin, studied, under surveillance. But they missed that plot.

When New York undercover officers and informants were infiltrating a mosque in 2006, they failed to notice the increasingly radical sentiments of a young man who prayed there. Police also kept tabs on a Muslim student group at a local collage, but missed a member's growing anti-Americanism.

Those two men, Najibullah Zazi at the mosque and Adis Medunjanin at the school, would go on to be accused of plotting a subway bombing that officials have called the most serious terrorist threat to the United States since Sept. 11, 2001.

Worse, when the NYPD tried to catch up to the FBI's good work on the case, it ended up tipping Zazi off to the investigation, making it harder to find Zazi's accomplices.

Media reports quoting anonymous FBI officials have suggested the NYPD botched the case when it showed a picture of Najibullah Zazi, the Denver shuttle-bus driver at the heart of the investigation, to Ahmed Afzali, a Queens Imam and sometime police informant. Afzali, the reports say, first called Zazi's father Mohammed, then Najibullah himself, alerting them to the probe. The FBI, which had been monitoring the calls, was then forced to move immediately to arrest the Zazis – much sooner than it had planned.

[snip]

When Zazi traveled to New York ahead of the anniversary of 9/11, the FBI as a precaution alerted the NYPD. That's when officers from the NYPD's intelligence unit consulted Afzali. "It looks like they did this on their own initiative – they really trusted this Imam," says the law-enforcement official. "But if they'd consulted with the bureau first, they'd have been told not to talk to anybody."

The NYPD was in Zazi's mosque, but it took the FBI to find the plot.

And as I reported last week, the NYPD also profiled the mosque that Mohammad Younis, the man whose hawala Faisal Shahzad used to fund his attack on Times Square.

On April 10, 2010, Mohammad Younis, of Centereach, NY, met with Faisal Shahzad at the Ronkonkoma train station and gave him \$7,000 in cash. That money went to buy fertilizer, propane, and gasoline that Shahzad used to build a bomb he tried to set off in Times Square three weeks later—the last real Islamic terrorist attack launched on New York City.

[snip]

It turns out the NYPD's profiling efforts got within 3 miles of Younis' house. They profiled his house of worship, the Islamic Association of Long Island. They profiled about 10 businesses in his community—though they focused on the halal restaurants, not the 7-11 where Younis used to work or the Lowes where he worked at the time he met with Shahzad. They also profiled a mosque and an auto repair shop in Ronkonkoma, the town where Shahzad met with Younis.

They never found Younis or his hawala activities, which he did not operate for profit.

It took an alert vendor, Duane Jackson, to prevent Shahzad's attack.

And then consider the possibility that the next big terrorist attack won't come from a mosque or a hawala. We're only calling the New Year's Day attack on a mosque—in which 70 people were praying—a “hate crime” and not a terrorist attack because the attacker, Ray Lazier Lengend, proved just as incompetent as most of the young men caught in NYPD's stings. The NYPD missed Lengend, too.

If the next terrorist attack comes not from a Muslim but a white supremacist like MLK Bomber Kevin Harpham, who made his violent intent clear in chat rooms, or a Timothy McVeigh, the commission that investigates the attack will look back at all the time and money NYPD wasted profiling Muslim grade schools and talk about the missed opportunity. It will note that, even now, it was clear all that spying had already missed the most significant attacks in the city. And the commission will note that the NYPD should have been looking for terrorists, not Muslims.

Mike Bloomberg, Chuck Schumer, the NYPost, the NYDN, and especially Ray Kelly ought to consider

whether they'll be defending this program then.