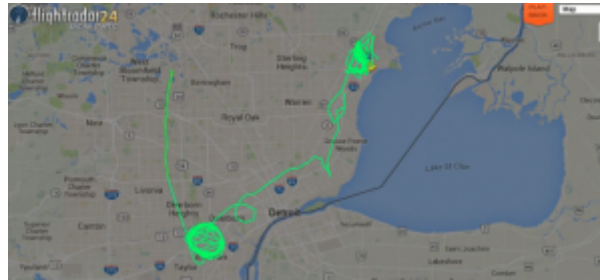


FBI FLIES ITS NOW-EXPOSED SPY PLANE OVER AMERICA'S BIGGEST ARAB-AMERICAN CITY



In June, the AP reported on the FBI's fleet of spy planes (following up on the work of the WaPo and independent journalists around the country). In it, they described how the FBI wanted them to keep the details of the front companies owning the planes secret.

The FBI asked the AP not to disclose the names of the fake companies it uncovered, saying that would saddle taxpayers with the expense of creating new cover companies to shield the government's involvement, and could endanger the planes and integrity of the surveillance missions. The AP declined the FBI's request because the companies' names – as well as common addresses linked to the Justice Department – are listed on public documents and in government databases.

That hasn't stopped the FBI from flying the planes under the same thin cover. Today, the Detroit Free Press reported that one of those planes has spent the last week flying over Dearborn, the biggest concentration of Arabs in the country.

The thing is, in spite of the claim to the AP

that FBI would need to create new covers for their secret spy planes, they didn't.

The 2010 Cessna is registered to a company called OTV Leasing of Bristow, Va. The registration, like other aircraft included in the AP investigation, is linked to a bank of post office boxes in Bristow.

OTV Leasing was among at least 13 fake companies used by the FBI that were identified during the AP investigation.

The chief executive of OTV Leasing is listed on aircraft records as Robert Lindley. The AP reported that Lindley is listed as CEO of several other front companies, and has at least three distinct signatures on aircraft records. The FBI did not disclose to the AP whether Lindley was a U.S. government employee; the news agency could not reach him for comment.

It's bad enough that the population of Dearborn is being surveilled by such a high tech plane. But to do so when *everyone now knows these are spy planes* is all the more problematic. It's almost hubristic, a display that the FBI can spy on that particularly population with impunity.

In Yemen they fly drones. In Dearborn, they fly planes that have already been outed as FBI spy tools.

Update: The FBI reassured community leaders this was not mass surveillance targeting a racial or religious communities.

The FBI was conducting a specific criminal probe and not investigating credible terror threats nor targeting racial or religious communities, the bureau told community leaders at a meeting Wednesday night.

[snip]

“Contrary to the suggestion of some recent media reporting, the FBI does not employ aviation assets to conduct mass surveillance nor to target specific communities,” Abbate said in a statement. “Neither does the FBI monitor lawfully protected First Amendment activity. Further, the FBI Detroit Field Office is not aware of any specific or credible threats within the local Detroit Metropolitan area.”

There are several problems with what has been relayed of this statement though (and CAIR-MI Director Dawud Walid makes some of them). First, what the FBI means by mass surveillance and what normal humans do are totally different things. If the surveillance is targeted, but sucks in thousands incidentally, FBI still doesn't consider it mass surveillance (nor does it report it as such in required congressional reporting).

Also, if you were targeting Dearborn's Arab-American residents, you'd be targeting neither based on religion (because a significant percentage of the Arab population is Christian) nor, technically, on race (Arab is not considered a race, at least by the census).

And the FBI has big, but secret, exceptions to what it considers “lawfully protected First Amendment activity.”

It may well be true that Dearborn's residents have nothing to worry about. But the statement – at least what got published here – should not allay any concerns.