Postal Inspectors Broke the Law by Monitoring American Social Media Accounts Without a Warrant

March 31, 2022 - It's been about a year now since we first wrote about a covert program called iCOP which was run by US Postal Inspectors Service (USPIS). The program was monitoring the social media accounts of average Americans supposedly looking for tell-tale signs of radicalization. iCOP was looking for people who were including certain words in their social media posts, including "attack," "destroy," and "attack.". Once those words were found, the people posting them would have their social media accounts further examined to see if they were making other, so-called anti-government posts. But now the USPIS Inspector General has issued a report that states that iCOP is illegal.

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According to the report, the USPIS is legally limited in its investigative authority. Those limits mean that any investigations that it runs are supposed to deal with threats to the US Post Office and to mail services. iCOP didn't do that. It cast a very wide net, looking for information that had nothing to do with the postal service.

Yahoo News was the first to report on the program, and almost immediately congress began requesting an investigation of it. The IG report is the result. According to the report, prior to Yahoo's reporting, iCOP used an unnamed, "intelligence tool to conduct searches that were not legally authorized."

As bad as the report is for the USPIS, it isn't the end of the story. iCOP is still in operation, under a new name. In fact, USPIS renamed the program almost immediately. It is now called the Analytics Team (AT). According to the IG's report, neither iCOP or AT were structured in a way that provided proper oversight to ensure they were operating within the bounds of the law. And given that an internal USPIS presentation that was published on the internet states that agents in the program only receive four days of training, it is quite likely that illegal activities are still occurring.
by Jim Malmberg
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