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HEADLINE: Civil liberties groups criticize FBI's monitoring of anti-war protesters

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BODY:

SUSAN MCGINNIS, anchor:

The FBI says it's trying to alert local police about possible extremist elements among anti-war protesters. But civil liberties groups complain the FBI's monitoring of anti-war protesters violates free speech rights. Randall Pinkston reports.

RANDALL PINKSTON reporting:

In the weeks before last month's anti-war protests in Washington and San Francisco, the FBI reportedly asked local law enforcement agencies to be on the lookout for suspicious activity and anarchists intent on violence. But skeptics charge, with heightened concerns about potential terror attacks in the aftermath of September 11th, the FBI may be crossing the line from protecting public safety to violating the constitutional right of free speech.

Senator THOMAS DASCHLE (Democrat, South Dakota): I'm very concerned about the reports that the FBI may be actually monitoring people participating in democracy. They ought to be fighting crime.

PINKSTON: An FBI spokesman told CBS News that as part of a weekly intelligence newsletter, it had told local police departments about training and fund-raising methods used by some anti-war groups because, 'where several thousand people are gathered for a peace demonstration, it's a target for terrorists. Our interest,' he says, 'is only on individuals or groups that will be involved in violent or criminal activities.'

Mr. ERIC FREEDMAN (Hofstra University Law School): We've been here before and it hasn't worked.

PINKSTON: It happened in the '60s and '70s when the FBI, then under J. Edgar Hoover, kept files on anti-war protesters, civil rights leaders and others who challenged the US government. Then and now, say critics, the FBI's methods may be counterproductive.

Mr. FREEDMAN: There's no terrorist in his right mind is going to call attention to himself by going to an anti-war demonstration, so you take resources that should be usefully used in catching terrorists and use them to disrupt peaceful protesters. So that makes no sense to start with.

PINKSTON: Already, some Americans who've attended anti-war demonstrations have found their names on government no-fly lists, intended to keep terrorists off airplanes. These people say the only thing they've done is to attend protests in opposition to US military and political policies. Randall Pinkston, CBS News, New York.

McGINNIS: This morning on "The Early Show," why your mattress may be killing your back. Plus, actor Robert Downey Jr.

I'm Susan McGinnis. This is the CBS MORNING NEWS.