

Los Angeles airport shooting prompts calls for further militarization of airport security

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A 23-year-old man opened fire at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) last Friday, killing a Transportation Security Administration (TSA) officer and wounding several other people before he was shot and critically injured and taken into custody by police. The incident has been seized upon by sections of the political establishment as evidence of the need to further expand the power of the TSA.

According to witnesses, the suspect, Paul Anthony Ciancia, came to LAX around 9 am Friday morning. He entered Terminal 3 with a rifle concealed in a modified luggage bag. His goal, according to a police examination of his suicide note, was to kill TSA officers and not harm anyone else. Inside the terminal Ciancia spotted a TSA officer, Gerardo Hernandez, and shot and killed him.

Ciancia eventually breached the screening gate and went into the secure area of the terminal. According to eyewitnesses, the gunman ignored anyone who was not a TSA officer. A witness told CNN that the gunman approached him and asked “TSA?” The witness shook his head “no” and Ciancia continued “calmly” on down the terminal.

The shooting caused a panic, as hundreds of people sprinted to get out of the terminal or hide in bathrooms or restaurants. The spree ended when the police tackled the gunman after shooting and seriously wounding him. Before being tackled the gunman shot three other people, two TSA agents and one civilian.

The incident led to a temporary shutdown of LAX. Over a hundred thousand travellers had their flights delayed or re-routed. The airport, the third busiest in the nation, only returned to full operation the next day.

The American Federation of Government Employees, which bargains for 45,000 TSA agents, called for arming certain TSA officers and giving them the power

of arrest. Jeffrey David Cox, the union president, stated, “we feel a larger and more consistent armed presence in screening areas would be a positive step in improving security for both [Transportation Security Officers] and the flying public.”

American Federation of Government Employees AFGE Local 332 President Kimberly Kraynak-Lambert told the *Los Angeles Times*, “I think that we should see more of a law enforcement presence,” adding, “I think whatever law enforcement entity that is currently at our airport needs to be increased by either roaming patrols and police in front and behind our security checkpoints ... We waste precious time calling for law enforcement if there is an incident at our checkpoints and [they] are not readily available.”

Los Angeles Airport Peace Officers Association president Marshall McClain told the *Los Angeles Times* in response to the shooting, “In general, the officers are a good idea,” adding, “They could be a deterrent.”

TSA Administrator John Pistole and US Attorney General Eric Holder called for a review of the attack. Holder said that airport security measures should be reviewed not only at LAX but also throughout the country.

The shooter, Paul Ciancia, is an unemployed motorcycle mechanic. He had recently moved out to Los Angeles from his home in New Jersey. In the note found on him, Ciancia expressed a desire to instill “fear” into the “traitorous” minds of the TSA officers. Additionally, the note had comments about the “New World Order” and denounced ex-chief of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano. Ciancia’s roommates told CNN that Ciancia was upset about the ongoing revelations regarding the NSA spying operations.

According to *Mother Jones*, more than 50 percent of gunmen in American mass shootings in the past 30

years have shown significant signs of mental illness prior to their shooting. From 2009 to 2012 US states slashed a total of \$4.35 billion in funding for public mental health. California is spearheading this process. Between 2009 and 2012 California's mental health budget was cut by 21 percent, or \$764.8 million.

The shooting reflects, albeit in distorted and indirect form, the growing militarization of American society. There is a connection between the actions of the federal government—its use of torture as well as the indefinite detention of innocent “suspects,” and the use of drones to kill innocent men, women and children as part of its “war on terror”—and the eruptions of violence in Los Angeles and elsewhere.

Officers of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), traditionally confined to airports, are increasingly patrolling all forms of mass transportation and public events. Such TSA “VIPR” teams have been used in Amtrak stations, bus terminals, and sporting events such as the Super bowl and Indianapolis 500, as well as rodeos, music festivals, and the Mall of America.

The militarization of American society was on full display in April when what amounted to a state of siege was imposed on the city of Boston, ostensibly to capture one teenage suspect after the marathon bombing. The entire population of a major American city was locked in their homes as combat-equipped police, virtually indistinguishable from troops, occupied the streets and conducted warrantless house-to-house searches.



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