

Report: Invasive US airport screenings unsuccessful at finding concealed weapons

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Transportation Security Administration (TSA) agents at airports throughout the country failed undercover inspections a staggering 95 percent of the time, according to the findings of an internal Homeland Security Inspector General's report summarized Monday by ABC News.

So-called "Red Teams" working for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), of which the TSA is a part, posed as passengers at airport security lines and attempted to smuggle in fake weapons. They were successful 67 out of 70 times. In one instance, TSA agents failed to uncover a fake explosive strapped to an inspector's chest, even after administering a pat-down after the "device" set off metal detectors.

In response to the findings, acting TSA Director Melvin Carraway was reassigned Monday to a position at DHS headquarters in the Office of State and Local Law Enforcement, which, according to its web site, "[serves] as the primary Department liaison to state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement." Carraway was temporarily serving as TSA director while Congress was in the process of approving the Obama administration's nominee for permanent director, Coast Guard Vice Admiral Pete Neffenger. Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson also released a statement outlining a vague six-step program of revised standards and improved training.

At the same time, Johnson declared his "confidence in the TSA workforce," citing the fact that "[I]ast fiscal year TSA screened a record number of passengers at airports in the United States, and, at the same time, seized a record number of prohibited items."

The poor test results for the TSA, established after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, are nothing new, according to security experts. "From day 1 the system never got below 95 percent failure. But nobody

acknowledged it and nobody published it," Israeli security consultant Rafi Sela told the *Washington Times*. Even Jeh Johnson was compelled to admit in his official statement that "The numbers in these reports never look good out of context."

The incident in which the investigator was able to smuggle a fake bomb through security was a virtual repeat of a test from 2013, when an investigator was also allowed to pass through after his fake bomb set off metal detectors and he was patted down. At the time, the TSA defended itself by pointing out that the tests are designed to be as difficult as possible, likening the "Red Teams" to "super-terrorists." "[Testers] know exactly what our protocols are," then-TSA administrator John Pistole told a House hearing. "They can create and devise and conceal items that ... not even the best terrorists would be able to do."

The ABC News report, however, follows a spate of similar studies indicating the ineffectiveness of the TSA's invasive security procedures. An inspector general's report last month found that the security equipment used by the agency is poorly maintained, despite four separate maintenance contracts totaling \$1.2 billion. It "cannot be assured that routine preventative maintenance is performed or that the equipment is repaired and ready for operational use," in large part due to a lack of reporting, the report stated.

In March, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a lawsuit against the TSA over its billion-dollar "Screening Passengers by Observation Techniques," or SPOT, program, based on junk science purporting to discover whether someone is planning to smuggle something onto an airplane via their "micro-expressions." The ACLU alleges that this program, in which passengers are singled out for additional screening literally because they "look" suspicious, falls

disproportionately heavily on minorities. The Obama administration continues to defend the program, rejecting a Freedom of Information Act request by the ACLU last October and despite disparaging reviews of the program's effectiveness by the Government Accountability Office and the DHS Inspector General.

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Last August, a study by researchers from UC San Diego, University of Michigan, and Johns Hopkins found that the invasive backscatter X-ray machines used between 2009 and 2013, which produced detailed images of passengers' naked bodies, found that anyone with a familiarity with the technology could easily conceal weapons using widely-available materials. In one case, the machine was unable to detect an explosive detonator attached to the subject's navel. "In laboratory tests with a real machine [which was easily purchased on eBay], we were able to conceal guns, knives, and explosive simulants in such a way that they were not visible to the scanner operator," the report concluded. Christopher Romig, a former lobbyist for Rapiscan Systems, which produced the machines, now works for the House Appropriations Committee's Homeland Security Subcommittee, which sets the TSA's budget.

While the TSA has proven to be thoroughly incompetent at its ostensible function, the omnipresent, invasive TSA security lines at every American airport serve an important propaganda function, helping to inculcate the notion that the country is in a "state of exception" that requires hundreds of millions of airline passengers to submit to invasive searches before boarding their planes. The fact that no terrorist attack has occurred on a US flight since 9/11, despite the ease with which investigators are able to penetrate the TSA's "security theater," indicates that the actual threat of terrorism is far less than that suggested by government and media hysteria.

More generally, the invasive pat-downs, the arbitrary singling out of individuals for additional screening, and the confiscation of innocuous products such as water bottles at TSA checkpoints serve to acclimate the American public to the sorts of routine and arbitrary searches and seizures integral to a police state, whose scaffolding is already well advanced. From this standpoint, whether or not these methods actually succeed in preventing terrorism is a secondary issue.



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