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Op-Ed: Airport security — How much is too much?

By: Leigh Goessl
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As acts of terrorism and other crimes have occurred over the past decade, government entities across the globe continue to tighten airport security. With the increased inspection and expense, how effective is it? With the intensive screening that occurs, is it really conducive to the betterment of society? A flight experience today is far different than days gone past. Travelers today can expect long wait lines in security at busy airports, scrutiny of what's packed in a carry-on bag, intensive pat-downs, and, of course, the controversial [Advanced Image Technology](#) (AIT) scanners.

Earlier this year claims of agents [targeting women](#) for the detailed scan were also raised. Additionally, there have been several reports of TSA [allegedly groping passengers](#), numerous [theft allegations](#), and other actions people are offended by surface on a regular basis.

In these incidents fingers are pointed at the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). Even [cupcakes became a safety hazard](#) as far as the TSA was concerned, which one Massachusetts teacher found out.

This is not to say all agents aren't doing a good job; just recently I was at an airport and the agents there were friendly, yet thorough, with no hint of any of the above types of activities. However, based on the number of videos, personal accounts and complaints that have surfaced, it is clear there is a high level of dissatisfaction with the extreme level of security these days. Some of which can be attributed to individual agents, but mainly with the overall policies put into place.

In [Nov. 2010](#), purportedly over 900 complaints about the TSA were logged with the ACLU. That year, at the height of the airline industry's "busy season", there

was a [grassroots call to boycott](#), called 'National Opt-Out Day', as a protest to the controversial full-body scanning machines.

Are the frustrations, hassles and costs attributed to providing this level of security at airports justified? Aside from all the privacy and freedom issues, there is also the concern of the safety of the AIT scanners and any potential negative health effects associated with its use and the [radiation emitted](#). The [TSA says its safe](#). On July 9, Jim Harper, of the Cato Institute, [started a petition](#) calling for President Obama to force the TSA to "promptly" comply with a July 2011 Court order that outlines the agency to [conduct a notice-and-comment rulemaking](#) on its policy of using AIT for primary screening at airports, then justify its use. To date, this process hasn't even been started.

Security is important, most people probably wouldn't dispute that, but how much is too much? Especially if there are flaws, such as this [one that a blogger claimed](#), reported by Digital Journal in March 2012.

The [recent discovery of a passenger](#) that boarded a plane, without a ticket and had totally bypassed any sort of security, perhaps further highlights the issue. In this case, a man managed to get all the way onto a plane without going through any checks. While officials proclaim secondary checks caught him before the flight took off, realistically he could have done some damage getting to this point. Fortunately, that was not the case, but theoretically, it could have been.

Should security be dismissed? Most air travel passengers would likely agree a level of security is needed, but how far is too far before the scale that balances privacy and security tips too far?

Canadian [officials recently announced](#) the debut of an audio-video surveillance system. Under this initiative, all travelers at Canadian airports (and border crossings) would be subjected to their conversations being eavesdropped on. Authorities [later backed down](#) on this issue, however the Pandora's box is now opened.

Perhaps there comes a point where the asking needs to be done if whether or not what's being protected resembles what was supposed to be safeguarded? Values seem to be changing - privacy and freedom often appears to be no longer

valued by lawmakers, a very different environment than early visionaries would have likely considered when pursuing governments based on democratic principles.

Granted, over the centuries technology has changed the name of the game, however does this mean that the fundamentals should be dismissed as values which are no longer important?

How often are offenders caught? Is the percentage substantial enough to justify the costs, both monetary and freedom-rooted? Or are we simply now stuck in a web of bureaucracy and lost privacies, and a costly one at that?