# Matt Yglesias

Dec 30th, 2009 at 5:18 pm

## The Security Line Threat



Obviously as long as we're going to have terrorist watch lists, then scrutinizing the visa applications of people on the lists seems like something we should do. But I'm extremely skeptical of the value of increased security at airports. The fact of the matter is that death by terrorist attack is extremely rare. Benjamin Friedman points to Nate Silver's calculation that in the last decade of US flights, there was one terrorist incident per 11,569,297,667 miles flown.

Under the circumstances, investing additional resources in defending airplanes is unlikely to be a cost effective investment. It's also worth underscoring the fact that flying in an airplane is much safer than driving. Insofar as stepped-up security makes flying both more expensive and more annoying, and therefore pushes more people to drive long distances, we're going to cost lives rather than save them. And at the end of the day, you have to understand that terrorists are not going to weaken America by killing us all a hundred at a time with bombs. They do much more to weaken America by induces us to waste money and strangle our economy.

The last point I would make, raised by DanVerg on Twitter, is that even if airplanes were completely secure you could always kill people by detonating a bomb in some other crowded place. For example, you could blow something up in a crowded airport security line.

One of the most important parts of counterterrorism is to try to ensure that our society is robust against the possibility of successful attack. Which is to say that if people are murdered by terrorists we need to mourn them, catch and punish the perpetrators, and move on. We need to keep moving people and goods around the country. We need to keep producing and purchasing goods and services. We need to keep our foreign policy focused on the big picture. Hysteria is the goal of attacks, and it's a shame to see that goal being served in the name of partisan politics.

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