



Virtual Strip Searches and Terrorism

The U.S. Transportation Security Agency official blog published a twist on the old Clement Clark Moore poem the day before Christmas and the attempted Christmas Day bombing of a Detroit-bound Northwest passenger airliner.

The [TSA adaptation](#) of *T'was the Night Before Christmas* began:

T'was the night before travel and all
through the suitcase,
Not an item was stirring not even the
toothpaste.
The stockings were packed in the bag
with great care,
With hopes that they soon would be in
the air....



Okay, it was terribly written. But the last line of the TSA version did have a far more sinister, if then-unintended, meaning:

Happy Holidays and we'll see you in 2010.

Ignore the part about "Happy Holidays," which is nothing more than the generic, non-religious, and meaningless government-mandated greeting Washington extracts from an explicitly Christmas-time poem. The more significant part of the line was the "we'll see you in 2010." Thanks to an expected purchase of 150 body scanners, *they will see you* — and probably a lot more of you than you'd prefer — in 2010. CNN.com [reported](#) on December 31:

One hundred and fifty new full-body scanning machines are set to be placed in airports across the United States as federal authorities work to close security loopholes exposed by the attempted Christmas Day bombing of a U.S.-bound airliner.

The Transportation Security Administration ordered the scanners before the bombing attempt for up to \$170,000 apiece. Plans are also in place to purchase an additional 300 units by 2012, TSA officials said.

These "full-body scanning machines" are virtual striptease machines, which can photograph or videotape your skin under your clothing. The Transportation Security Agency (TSA) noted in a [December 27 press release](#):

Passengers flying into the United States from abroad can expect to see additional security measures at international airports such as increased gate screening including pat-downs and bag searches. During flight, passengers may be asked to follow flight crew instructions, such as stowing personal items, turning off electronic equipment and remaining seated during certain portions of the flight.

The press release was issued in direct reaction to would-be underwear bomber Umar Farouk



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on January 3, 2010

Abdulmutallab, who tried to light a bomb package strapped to his genitals on a Christmas Day Northwest Airlines flight. Abdulmutallab had been on a terrorist watch list but was not chosen for extra scrutiny. As a result of Abdulmutallab's incompetent effort, the TSA has recommended that airline passengers remain virtual prisoners in their tiny seats during much of the flight, be restricted in bathroom breaks like kindergartners, and have their naked bodies painstakingly leered at by TSA screeners.

Government officers have hinted to the press that they won't keep the nude pictures they take of passengers with the scanners. "TSA officials have attempted to address privacy concerns by promising to blur pictures of passengers' faces and delete all images produced," CNN [reported](#) December 31.

Of course the government promises not to keep any of the pictures. But this line comes from the same government that biannually promises to keep its operations within the limits of the U.S. Constitution's specifically delegated powers. Like congressional oaths of office, the government won't keep this promise either. There are too many "good reasons" not to keep the promise and too many "national security interests" served by keeping nude pictures of airline travelers. Once the first bomber gets through the TSA peeping-toms — and that will happen — a hue-and-cry will be raised to find out why there was once more a "[systemic failure](#)" of our airport screening techniques. And they'll have to go back to videotape, just like all losing NFL coaches do. Notably, none of these government promises to delete the pictures/video appear in official documents. "Promises, like pie crusts," Vladimir Lenin of Russia said of Western politicians, "were made to be broken." It may have been the only truthful statement in his long and bloody career.

It's not surprising that the would-be bomber Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab was on a terrorist watch list and didn't get stopped for extra frisking. In our intelligence-infested government, the CIA officials who suspected Abdulmutallab didn't forward the information to the Transportation Security Agency because they didn't trust the TSA with the information. Considering that the TSA recently [put its whole security screening manual up on the Internet](#) for all the world's terrorists to see, one can almost understand why.

But even if the TSA had a spotless record in keeping security documents safe, the CIA would never be disposed to reveal its suspicions to the TSA or any other government agency without some sort of an explicit mandate from the top. In short, airline security is far from the top priority of most of our intelligence agencies. The real top priority of intelligence agencies is to get more intelligence and more sources of information, which explains why seven CIA officers — including the local station chief — were blown to smithereens in an Afghanistan bombing on December 31. Those CIA agents there were actually [engaged in attempting to recruit the very terrorist who ended their lives](#); the CIA was not trying to stop the bomber's movements. The CIA may also have wanted to recruit Abdulmutallab as an informant eventually, so why spoil the opportunity by sending the information over to the TSA?

The CIA is and always has been more interested in recruiting terrorists as informants than stopping them, and that is — technically speaking — its primary mission. The death of the Khost station chief in Afghanistan at the end of last year was only a single example of how the CIA undertakes its mission of intelligence for intelligence's sake.

People who complain that our national security agencies have a higher priority than the protection of the lives of Americans — or worse still, those who don't believe these higher priorities exist — simply don't understand the reality. We as a nation have "vital national security interests" that can't be compromised by protecting mere American civilians, according to the reigning wisdom in Washington



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bureaucracies. We've got to protect the political leadership of our vital allies (including torturing regimes that export torture such as Uzbekistan, Syria, Egypt and Yemen) as well as a sprawling empire of "vital national security interests" around the world. We have "vital national security interests" everywhere in the world, the bureaucrats note, with the possible exception of the territorial United States. Those are the priorities for intelligence, and they aren't likely to change any time soon.

But the TSA has to appear to be doing something. So with the installation of the pricey new full-body scanners, the TSA has publicly begun constructing its own Maginot Line of "security" in the place of doing actual police work. Construction of the new Maginot Line is a bipartisan effort, as former Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff under the Bush regime has endorsed the latest line of government voyeurism. "This plot is an example of something we've known could exist in theory, and in order to be able to detect it, you've got to find some way of detecting things in parts of the body that aren't easy to get at," Chertoff [told](#) the *Washington Post* Christmas Day. "It's either pat-downs or imaging, or otherwise hoping that bad guys haven't figured it out, and I guess bad guys have figured it out."

But terrorists will eventually defeat this latest intrusion and indignity imposed upon air travelers. They always do. The TSA could completely immobilize every airline passenger by putting them in arm and leg manacles and fasten them to their seats for the duration of the flight and terrorists would still find a way around the procedures. In truth, there's no such thing as perfect security. That's especially true in a free country.

Rather than going after the actual terrorists (which, admittedly, our foreign policy is multiplying with every new Islamic country we bomb), federal officials are now assuming that all Americans are potential terrorists. One might ask, how did our nation ever get by safely over the past 100 years in the days before full-body scanners? How did airline flights land safely without making passengers prisoners at their tiny, uncomfortable seats for the duration of the long-delayed flights? The answer is pretty simple. In the old days, police trailed and arrested hijackers instead of recruited them, and the private airlines themselves set reasonable screening measures based upon specific threats.

Now everyone has to go shoeless before going on an airplane, and will soon be photographed nude. You can trust the TSA to keep nude photos of you private, officials say. Yet they couldn't manage to keep their own screening manual from being published on the Internet! In addition, Americans will be confined like prisoners to their seats during much of the flight. All this has happened in the eight years since we federalized airport security and put it in the hands of the same incompetent federal bureaucrats who published their manual for all the world's terrorists to see. Today everyone is a suspect, which is another way of saying that no one is.

In the old days Americans insisted their government respect freedom and privacy much more. Oddly enough, Americans were more secure back in those days when we valued individual rights as a higher priority and there were fewer security measures at airports. Benjamin Franklin [wrote back in 1759](#): "They who can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety." It's hard to say whether we deserve it or not, but it does seem to be a fact of history that people who trade liberty for security eventually possess neither. And that's a hard fact that Americans may soon re-learn.



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