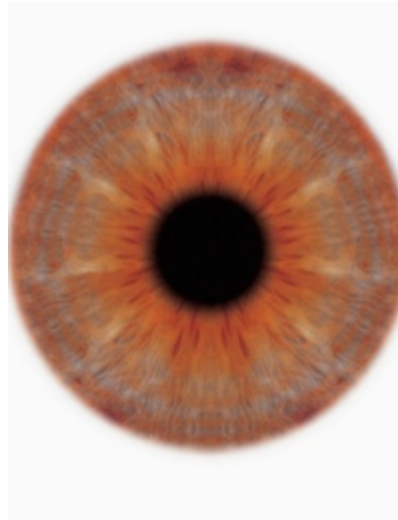Written by **Thomas R. Eddlem** on September 16, 2010

Iris Scan Coming to Airports, Focusing Terror Hunt on Innocent

"The Homeland Security Department plans to test futuristic iris scan technology that stores digital images of people's eyes in a database and is considered a quicker alternative to fingerprints," USA Today reported September 13. The new technology reportedly can scan irises from as far away as six feet, rather than the traditional several inches.

"The test will help us determine how viable this is for potential (department) use in the future," Arun Vemury, program manager at the Homeland Security department's Science and Technology branch, told *USA Today.* But this is no ordinary "test." The same newspaper reported September 10 that the "test" will cost taxpayers as much as $10 billion, and the high-tech firm Accenture has already received at least $185 million from the kitty for the "test":

> Two years ago, another big corporation, Accenture, won potentially the largest contract in the Department of Homeland Security's short history. Accenture plans to use biometrics and other technology to process foreign visitors as they enter the country. The contract could run as long as 10 years and generate up to $10 billion for the company.

Accenture boasts on its corporate website that it has already created a model for iris scanning at airports abroad. "Accenture has worked with UK officials to create a biometrics-enabled gate at Heathrow Airport to move registered travelers through customs faster."

Civil libertarians say the fundamental problem with iris scans is the same as with many other high-tech "solutions" to the terrorist problem: They presume all people are guilty until proven innocent, making it one of the most costly and ineffective efforts directed at thwarting crimes. There's no evidence governments need the biometric data of all Americans to fight terrorism, they argue. While other Americans pooh-pooh the intrusion upon their privacy with the thought that "if I'm not guilty, then I have nothing to worry about," civil libertarians effectively argue that the guilty-until-proven innocent mentality means many Americans do in fact have something to worry about. The mentality has already led to great inconvenience for many travelers (and rendition to foreign jails followed by horrific torture for some innocent foreign-born fliers).

The biometric scanning and storage of everyone's iris scans and fingerprints in a government bureaucracy's database may not even be able to prevent a single act of terrorism. In fact, a Google search for terrorists arrested through use of biometric searches at airports comes up blank despite the

test airports already open around the world. Biometric scans are designed to detect known terrorists using false identities. But none of the September 11 highjackers, for example, was on watch lists and all had immigrated legally using their actual names. Biometrics can do nothing to stop these first-time terrorists, something terrorist networks are already in the habit of using for their nefarious work.

Moreover, biometric scanning and maintaining these huge databases already constitute one of the nation's most expensive anti-terrorism systems. The multi-billion dollar biometric method of concentrating on everyone — hundreds of millions of people who must prove they are innocent before they can fly — can be contrasted with the far less expensive traditional crime-solving alternate of focusing upon finding the relatively few number of criminals. Traditional methods put the focus upon gathering evidence from the few potential terrorists guilty of planning harm, a far more cost-effective method than biometric scanning, and one which has a far better track record in locking up terrorists.

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