New American

Written by **Becky Akers** on January 15, 2010

Mythbusters

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) gropes us and rifles our belongings at airports while robbing us of $7 billion annually. It spends some of that loot on propaganda, whether press releases that the corporate media recycles lest reporters waste time researching and writing their own stories, or a website. The latter featured a column called "Myth Busters" from June 2007 through March 2009. In it, the TSA's spinners tried to refute whatever bits of truth had escaped the agency's black hole.

Let's turn the TSA's tradition on its head by busting a couple of genuine myths with the truth. The TSA has never endorsed either of these falsehoods, but they are perennially popular among passengers who clamor for something, anything, to rescue them from the agency's abuse. And they have reappeared with a vengeance after Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab's attempt to immolate himself during a flight on Christmas Day.

The first: profiling can protect us. Proponents argue that "since Muslims took down Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988, every attack on a commercial airliner has been committed by foreign-born Muslim men with the same hair color, eye color and skin color." That makes securing aviation very simple: the Feds should "search Muslims" rather than "[harass] infinitely compliant Americans."

Even a fatuous neocon can be half right. Americans are indeed infinitely compliant, not only at checkpoints but anywhere the jackboots of the police state tread on them. They're a heck of a lot easier to intimidate than Al Qaeda's warriors would be, for all the good that does – further reason to abolish the TSA. Meanwhile, siccing it on Muslims protects nothing other than screeners' jobs.

It isn't hard to see why. Once the TSA announces this new policy in a press release ("To Enhance Passenger Air-Safety Protection, TSA to Focus Screening Protocol on Male Individuals of Specific Ethnic Background Only") its lapdogs in the media will print the bilge, as usual. And an alerted Al Qaeda (which, in the neocon's extremely limited view of the world, is responsible for all crimes an established government disclaims) will immediately recruit Japanese men or Irish women – witting or otherwise.

This isn't mere theory. In 1972, "the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine said they had recruited…gunmen from the Japanese Red Army" who "opened fire on crowds at Lod International Airport in Tel Aviv, Israel, killing 26 people and injuring dozens more." And in 1986, Nezar Hindawi conned a chambermaid living in London into believing he would marry her at his family's home in Israel. He packed a bomb in her suitcase before kissing her good-bye. British cops found the explosives

and arrested her. (They ultimately released this heartbreaking and innocent pawn.)

Empowering the State to search some people enlarges and strengthens it enough to search all. Which it in fact will because it gains enormous power: not only does it find and confiscate contraband while punishing smugglers, it cows citizens who fear the humiliation of a search. No government will ever rest content hassling a fraction of the population when it can intimidate everyone. Encouraging the Feds to frisk some folks empowers them to molest us all.

Watch this play out as the TSA takes the first step in profiling *foreigners*. It "has directed airlines to give full-body pat-downs to U.S.-bound travelers from Yemen, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia and 11 other countries," all but one of which are mostly Moslem. Whoopee: that'll catch all the Yemenites bringing *shurba bisan* to their American cousins and the Nigerian grandparents with toy tigers for grandkids in New York. Terrorists will simply fly to Germany, China, or another country before booking tickets to the US – and the TSA will use that as its excuse for searching *all* foreign passengers.

Yet one country earns extravagant admiration from Americans who fear terrorism threatens us as much as our rulers pretend. They say we can protect ourselves by mimicking Israel's aggressive and offensive "security."

Alas, the TSA already incorporates some Israeli ideas, including one of its most absurd: "Consultant Rafi Ron worked with [Boston Logan Airport] to develop behavior pattern recognition. It's based on a similar technique used at Israel's Ben Gurion Airport, where Ron was head of security." The TSA describes its "Behavior Detection Officers" as "utiliz[ing] non-intrusive behavior observation and analysis techniques to identify potentially high-risk passengers… TSA's BDO-trained security officers are screening travelers for involuntary physical and physiological reactions that people exhibit in response to a fear of being discovered." Translation: these bozos believe they can read minds. They look for passengers who sweat or seem nervous – which includes just about everyone nowadays, thanks to the stress the TSA and the airlines inflict – and interrogate them as terrorists.

Predictably, folks who endure Israel's punishing process aren't nearly as enthused as those idealizing it from afar: "These days [July 2007], Israel's airport security screening system can leave you with the impression that it is either inept or deliberately set up to harass travelers," complained Dion Nissenbaum, "who covered the Middle East as Jerusalem bureau chief for McClatchy Newspapers from 2005 to 2009."

Then there's this from a supervisor at Ben Gurion International Airport near Tel Aviv: "It is quite intrusive, the questions we ask … And, sometimes, people are not happy to answer them."

Indeed. One unhappy respondent was "Rosemary Mahoney … a writer from Rhode Island, not a terrorist." She described her ordeal: "The questions were shocking… Not just where I had been, but what hotels I had stayed i[n — *sic*]. Did I have receipts for those hotels? What were the names of the people I had met…?… Where was my ticket home? …Every last item in my luggage had been taken out and spread out on tables about the room. … And there was a man at the end of the room, feeding everything into an X-ray machine." All that humiliation was in vain: the authorities prohibited Ms. Mahoney from boarding. "It wasn't pleasant. I was actually very anxious. And didn't really know what would happen to me."

Israel can torment every passenger for hours because it is a small country with far fewer patrons clogging its 14 commercial airports than the U.S. has. Ben Gurion, its busiest, boasted only 11,478,027 international passengers in 2008 with perhaps another 500,000 domestic ones. Contrast that with

[Atlanta's 90,039,280, Chicago's 69,353, 876 or even Minneapolis' 34,056,443](#) customers that year. Lengthy grilling of every passenger would bring American aviation to a halt. And for what? No terrorists have attacked any flight originating in the US since 9/11.

Terrorism is among the least of the dangers confronting us. The National Center for Health Statistics calculates that our odds of perishing in such an attack are … [zero](#). But we stand a [1 in 8,848 chance of dying through government's "legal intervention](#)," whether via "firearm discharge" or "execution."

It's time we recognized and repudiated the real enemy.

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