



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on October 21, 2011

TSA Stages Highway Searches to Show Its Tennessee Valley Authority

“Tennessee is now the first state ever to work with the TSA to deploy a simultaneous counterterrorism operation statewide,” according to Nashville’s [WTVF-TV](#). That operation, which involved the TSA along with the Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security (TDSHS) and state and local police, was deployed at “five weigh stations and two bus stations across the state,” the station reports.

It was a two-pronged approach, the report adds. Government agents were “recruiting truck drivers ... into the First Observer Highway Security Program to say something if they see something.” At the same time, “the Tennessee Highway Patrol checked trucks with drug and bomb sniffing dogs during random inspections.”



One might expect the searches to make recruiting more difficult; but at least one truck driver, Rudy Gonzales, seemed willing to assist the TSA just the same. He told WTVF reporter Adam Ghassemi: “Not only truck drivers, but cars, everybody should be aware of what’s going on, on the road.”

The searches, of course, are a clear violation of the Fourth Amendment, which requires government agents to obtain a warrant based “upon probable cause” prior to searching a person’s “houses, papers, and effects.” No warrants had been issued; and none of the trucks, buses, drivers, or passengers was suspected of any wrongdoing. In fact, TDSHS Deputy Commissioner Larry Godwin specifically stated that the VIPR operations were “not based on any particular threat,” according to the *Jackson Sun*.

What, then, was the purpose of the searches? Godwin “said the checks at the weigh stations were about showing the people of Tennessee the government is serious about transportation safety, and to make sure the state is ready in case something were to happen,” wrote the *Sun*. (He also warned that “later this week similar inspections will be done at airports across the state,” the paper reports.)

Randomly searching passing trucks when there is no specific threat in view hardly seems like a “serious” approach to protecting the traveling public. Rather, it seems more like another attempt “to subjugate, control, and intimidate citizens until they degenerate into docile dependents of the police-state,” as [Becky Akers](#) described earlier TSA “security theater” presentations. She elaborated:

Governments benefit enormously from searching their subjects — especially when those searches can ensnare anyone at any time in any place. Such random rubbings guarantee that almost everybody will obey his rulers’ decrees. What American pothead will stuff a baggie of weed in his pocket before leaving home if he knows cops will probably frisk him on the street? Likewise, what Chinese Christian totes a Bible with him? Will a Moslem in Saudi Arabia carry a bottle of wine to



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his friend's home when invited to dinner?

Then there is the matter of recruiting truck drivers — and, says WTVF, “every driver” — to act as snitches for the state.

“Somebody sees something somewhere and we want them to be responsible citizens, report that and let us work it through our processes to abet the concern that they had when they saw something suspicious,” Paul Armes, TSA Federal Security Director for Nashville International Airport, told the station.

Those familiar with the Stasi, the secret police of East Germany, will recognize this modus operandi all too well. The Stasi, under the leadership of Erich Mielke, maintained an extensive network of informants — potentially as many as [one out of every seven East Germans](#) — to keep the state up to date on the thoughts and movements of everyone in the country. Says [Wikipedia](#): “A large number of Stasi informants were trolley conductors, janitors, doctors, nurses and teachers; Mielke believed the best informants were those whose jobs entailed frequent contact with the public.” Truck drivers surely fall into this category.

Undoubtedly many Stasi informants thought they were doing their patriotic duty by snitching on their friends, neighbors, and relatives. Some may even have helped prevent genuine crimes. Likewise, many Americans who find something suspicious — a Bible, a turban, or even a [Ron Paul bumper sticker](#) — about their neighbors may believe they are doing the right thing by reporting their suspicions to the police when, in fact, they are helping to destroy everyone's God-given, constitutionally protected rights. The TSA's informant program has a long way to go to reach the size or depravity of the Stasi's; but its very existence is a significant and dangerous step in that direction.

That VIPR — pronounced, appropriately, “viper” — is not merely, or even primarily, about combating terrorism but about establishing government control is made clear by a statement from Godwin. Noting that western Tennessee is a heavily traveled area, Godwin said, “Everything from Wal-Mart merchandise to illegal drugs and illegal immigrants are transported through this area. Current interdiction units are doing a good job, but further coordinated inspections will only strengthen their efforts. If we prepare for the worst, then we are ready for almost anything.”

One doubts that those Congressmen and Senators who voted to establish the TSA intended for it to be used to fight the (unconstitutional) War on Drugs or to stop illegal immigration. But mission creep is a problem in any bureaucracy, and more so in one given such a wide berth as the TSA. Few legislators dare criticize the TSA lest they be accused of siding with terrorists, and so the agency's ongoing violations of the Constitution and basic human decency continue apace.

State and local police departments, unfortunately, cannot be counted on to defend their citizens against federal overreach, either. Besides the Tennessee Highway Patrol, notes the *Sun*, “various police departments across the state, including large departments such as those in cities like Knoxville, Chattanooga, Nashville and Memphis were involved in the checks at the weigh stations.”

“Where is a terrorist most apt to be found?” asked TDSHS Commissioner Bill Gibbons. “Not these days on an airplane; more likely on the interstate.” Gibbons was correct. But the people terrorizing Americans on the interstate are not swarthy foreigners; they're government agents.



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