

# Airport Security: Welcome to Scannergate

Terror Scares A Boon for Security Grifters

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Call them what you will: bottom feeders, corporate con-men, flim-flam artists, peddlers of crisis, you name it.

You can't help but marvel how enterprising security firms have the uncanny ability to sniff-out new opportunities wherever they can find, or manufacture, them.

After all, nothing sells like fear and in "new normal" America fear is an industry with a limitless growth potential.

While Republicans and Democrats squabble over who's "tougher" when it comes to invading and pillaging other nations (in the interest of "spreading democracy" mind you), a planetary grift dubbed the "War on Terror," waiting in the wings are America's new snake-oil salesmen.

Welcome to Scannergate!

With airport security all the rage, companies that manufacture whole body imaging technologies and body-scanners stand to make a bundle as a result of last December's aborted attack on Northwest Airlines Flight 253.

Like their kissin' cousins at the Pentagon, poised to bag a \$708 billion dollar windfall in the 2011 budget, securocrats over at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) stand to vacuum-up some \$56.3 billion next year, a \$6 billion increase.

According to the agency's February 1 [budget announcement](#), funding requirements will prioritize "efforts to enhance security measures that protect against terrorism and other threats ... reflecting the Department's commitment to fiscal discipline and efficiency."

In keeping with America's unstoppable slide to the right, President Obama created a commission on Thursday by executive order promising to "fix" the yawning budget deficit by establishing-what else!-a "bipartisan fiscal commission."

Promising to "slash" the deficit, by shredding the already-tattered social safety net, disemboweling programs such as Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security, Obama named former Republican Senator Alan Simpson and former Clinton White House chief of staff Erskine Bowles to lead the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, [BusinessWeek](#) reported.

According to the [World Socialist Web Site](#), Simpson, a troglodytic right-winger, told The Washington Post, "How did we get to a point in America where you get to a certain age in

life, regardless of net worth or income, and you're 'entitled'?" he asked. "The word itself is killing us."

Bowles, a major fundraiser for the Clinton's, is "currently on the board of directors of Morgan Stanley, one of the big five Wall Street investment houses" as well as a director of General Motors, socialist critic Patrick Martin informs us. Tellingly, "Bowles served as chairman of the compensation committee at both companies, and still holds that position at Morgan Stanley, making him the point man for the awarding of eight-figure salaries and bonuses to the executives of both companies," Martin averred.

"Off the table," are any proposals that would slash the Pentagon's bloated budget or any of the other fiscal goodies financing the "War on Terror."

Reflecting Homeland Security's "fiscal discipline and responsibility," at the top of the wish-list are what officials describe as increased spending for Advanced Imaging Technology (AIT) by the Transportation Security Agency (TSA).

In 2011, the Department says it is requesting \$217.7M to "install 500 advanced imaging technology machines at airport checkpoints to detect dangerous materials, including non-metallic materials."

"This request," coupled "with planned deployments for 2010, will provide AIT coverage at 75 percent of Category X airports and 60 percent of the total lanes at Category X through II airports."

Next up is a \$218.9M demand for "Transportation Security Officers (TSOs) to Staff AITs." New funds are required for "additional TSOs, managers and associated support costs to operate AITs at airport checkpoints."

You can't have one without the other, so it's a real job creator and win-win all around! Right? Well, not exactly...

### Annals of Homeland Stupidity

As a secret state agency, TSA has proven itself so effective in protecting us from terrorists, especially the "homegrown" variety referred to in the literature as "clean skins," that the American Civil Liberties Union filed a [lawsuit](#) February 10 on behalf of Pomona College student Nicholas George.

According to the civil liberties' watchdog group, George was "abusively interrogated, handcuffed and detained for nearly five hours at the Philadelphia International Airport," by TSA, Philadelphia police and the FBI. His "crime"? George was kept prisoner because "of a set of English-Arabic flashcards he was carrying in connection with his college language studies."

Ben Wizner, a staff attorney with the ACLU's National Security Project, said in a press release: "Nick George was handcuffed, locked in a cell for hours and questioned about 9/11 simply because he has chosen to study Arabic, a language that is spoken by hundreds of millions of people around the world. This sort of harassment of innocent travelers is a waste of time and a violation of the Constitution."

Memo to the ACLU: as is well known to Fox News viewers and Glenn Beck fans, only

“terrorists” speak Arabic; ipso facto, George is a terrorist. How else explain his dubious interest in learning a language spoken by none other than Osama bin Laden himself!

But wait, there’s more!

The [Philadelphia Inquirer](#) reported February 15 that the four-year-old disabled son of a Camden, NJ police officer “wasn’t allowed to pass through airport security” until he took his leg braces off!

Inquirer columnist Daniel Rubin writes, “Ryan was taking his first flight, to Walt Disney World, for his fourth birthday.” Developmentally delayed, the result of his premature birth, the child had just starting walking in March.

After breaking down the stroller, the family passed through the metal detector when, ding! ding! ding! the alarm sounded. That’s when the screener told the family: either take off the leg braces or no Disney World for you, suckers.

Understandably, the family was “dumbfounded” by TSA’s insensitive behavior. Ryan’s father, Bob Thomas said, “I told them he can’t walk without them on his own.”

“He [the screener] said, ‘He’ll need to take them off’.”

Reluctantly, they complied and the family passed through, in single file. Mercifully, the child made it without falling.

Quite naturally, the parents were “furious.”

Rubin reports that after demanding to see a supervisor, one of TSA’s “finest” asked the couple “what was wrong.”

“I told him, ‘This is overkill. He’s 4 years old. I don’t think he’s a terrorist.’”

The supervisor told Bob Thomas and his wife, Leona, “You know why we’re doing this.”

(Yes, we know all-too-well why you’re “doing this.”)

Keeping Us “Safe”

Why does TSA need nearly a half billion dollars in taxpayer-funded largesse? Because “passenger screening is critical to detecting and preventing individual carrying dangerous or deadly objects from boarding planes,” grammar-challenged DHS secuocrats inform us.

Right, it keeps us safe!

Wait a minute, didn’t Heimat Secretary Janet Napolitano tell CNN reporter Candy Crowley on the Sunday chat show [“State on the Union”](#) December 27 that “the system worked,” after a real terrorist, not a college kid or four-year-old, nearly brought down an airliner with a bomb hidden in his underwear?

Perhaps what Ms. Napolitano meant to say is that the system would have worked if TSA’s “Intelligence Community” partners over at the NCTC and CIA hadn’t allowed Abdulmutallab, a watch listed individual, to board Flight 253 on Christmas Day.

After all, as NCTC's Director Michael E. Leiter testified January 20 before the Senate Homeland Security Committee they wanted him "here in the country for some reason or another."

Wouldn't it be reasonable then, to conclude that handing out even more boodle to corporate grifters won't keep us any safer.

Heavens no!

On New Year's eve, former Homeland Security chief Michael Chertoff penned a [Washington Post](#) op-ed that argued "whole-body imagers" should be deployed world-wide.

Countering critics who charge that said scanners are overly-intrusive and will do little or nothing to stop a determined individual from smuggling a liquid bomb onto a plane, Chertoff dismissed naysayers as uninformed Cassandras.

"From the outset" Chertoff declared, "deployment of the machines has been vigorously opposed by some groups." Citing charges by the American Civil Liberties Union ([ACLU](#)) and the Electronic Privacy Information Center ([EPIC](#)) that body-scanners amount to a virtual strip-search, Chertoff said such claims are "calculated to alarm the public."

According to the former Bushist official, "it's either pat downs or imaging."

Currently TSA has fielded 40 machines at 19 airports with more on the way. Indeed, the agency handed out a \$25 million [contract](#) last October to [Rapiscan Security Systems](#) for 30 more peep-show devices with funds generously provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

What Chertoff failed to disclose however, is that since leaving the secret state's employ his security consulting firm, [The Chertoff Group](#), "includes a client that manufactures the machines" according to [The Washington Post](#).

Nevertheless, in the wake of the Christmas Day provocation, TSA announced in January "it will order 300 more machines."

While Rapiscan was the only company to qualify for the contract "because it had developed technology that performs the screening using a less-graphic body imaging system," the Post reports that the giant defense and security firm, L-3 Communications, have jogged onto the field and are eager to grab as much as they can.

Not everyone however, is enthralled with Chertoff's shameless strategem to feather his own nest.

Kate Hanni, the founder of [FlyersRights.org](#), which opposes scanner deployment told the Post, "Mr. Chertoff should not be allowed to abuse the trust the public has placed in him as a former public servant to privately gain from the sale of full-body scanners under the pretense that the scanners would have detected this particular type of explosive."

Hanni wrote a [blog post](#) January 29, citing a 2005 study published by the Canadian Journal of Police & Security Services "that there is not one end-all, be-all way to prevent terrorists from smuggling explosives on board airliners."

“The Rapiscan full-body scanner” is less than adequate when it comes to detecting liquid explosives, Hanni avers.

“In fact” she writes, “though it can depict a person’s unclothed body with shocking detail (a virtual strip search), it is capable of detecting only objects within one tenth of an inch of the outer skin on a human body. Translation: A terrorist who conceals explosives in a body cavity, crevice, adult diaper, feminine protection, etc., will walk through a full-body scanner completely undetected.”

But since “abusing the public trust” amounts to little more than business as usual in Washington, one can be reasonably certain that security grifters will make a killing exploiting America’s latest panic: the dreaded “body-scanner gap.”

Laughing All the Way to the Bank

To get the skinny on scanners however, one needs to refer to numerous investigative reports published in the press—the British press, that is.

[The Independent on Sunday](#) reported January 3, that the “explosive device smuggled in the clothing of the Detroit bomb suspect would not have been detected by body-scanners set to be introduced in British airports, an expert on the technology warned last night.”

Indeed, officials at the British Department of Transport and the Home Office “already tested the scanners and were not persuaded that they would work comprehensively against terrorist threats to aviation.”

Since December’s failed attack, TSA has touted the efficacy of deploying “millimeter-wave” whole body scanners that come with a hefty built-in price tag.

One security expert, Conservative MP Ben Wallace told IoS that scientists at the UK defense firm Qinetiq, a powerhouse in the “homeland security” market in Britain and the U.S., demonstrated that “the millimetre-wave scanners picked up shrapnel and heavy wax and metal, but plastic, chemicals and liquids were missed.”

“If a material is low density, such as powder, liquid or thin plastic—as well as the passenger’s clothing—the millimetre waves pass through and the object is not shown on screen,” journalist Jane Merrick informs us.

Wallace added, “X-ray scanners were also unlikely to have detected the Christmas Day bomb.”

Why then would TSA be so keen on such an enormous cash outlay for a technology with a less than sterling track record?

[The Guardian](#) reported January 18 that since the aborted attack, “investors have been quick to spot a rapid profit.”

Guardian correspondent Andrew Clark tells us that Michael Chertoff’s client, Rapiscan, “has seen its shares in its parent company, OSI Systems, leap by 27% since Christmas. American Science and Engineering, is up by 16% and has deployed its chief executive to have his own body scanned on live television.”

[The Financial Times](#) reported January 4, that Rapiscan's "executive vice-president for global government affairs, said interest in the company's full-body scanners, which are approved for use in the US, had been 'extreme'."

"We are spending a tremendous amount of time right now answering questions about production capacity, delivery capabilities and basically mapping out positioning in airports," the executive told the Financial Times.

You bet they are!

Business analysts said that "installing scanners within the US could cost \$300m—paid for, in part, by economic stimulus money."

And, as American security officials strong-arm other nations into scanning passengers on U.S.-bound flights "the outlay could double internationally," The Guardian averred.

Los Angeles-based Imperial Capital analyst Michael Kim told The Guardian, "We estimate that there are approximately 2,000 security lanes at US airports, each of which would require a body scanning machine if that's the route the TSA chooses to take. Our information is that the cost of each scanner is around \$150,000."

But Rapiscan isn't the only game in town and will soon be facing stiff competition from security giant [L-3 Communications](#).

Clocking-in at [No. 8](#) on Washington Technology's "Top 100" list of prime federal contractors with some \$4,236,653,555 in revenues, L-3 has entered the heimat market in a big way.

Heavily-leveraged in defense and security, major customers include the Defense Department, with contracts from the Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force. While the firm's business lines include C3ISR (Command, Control, Communication, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance), L-3 provides extensive IT support to NSA on its illegal domestic surveillance and data mining programs.

L-3's move has already proved to be a boon to shareholders. The Guardian reported that TSA has ordered "\$165m-worth of scanners, using both millimetre and X-ray technology" from the firm.

While L-3 will reap a windfall from the American people, Government Accountability Office investigators [reported](#) in 2008 that the firm has 15 foreign subsidiaries in C3ISR powerhouses such as Barbados (1), Bermuda (1), Cayman Islands (1), Costa Rica (1), Hong Kong (1), Ireland (1), Singapore (5) and the U.S. Virgin Islands (3).

As [Antifascist Calling](#) revealed February 14, moving operations offshore helped defense contractors reduce taxes owed to federal and state governments by avoiding Social Security, Medicare and unemployment insurance payroll taxes for American workers hired by the foreign subsidiaries.

Another statistic the firm is probably not too keen on publicizing is their prominent place on the Project on Government Oversight's (POGO) [Federal Contractor Misconduct Database](#) that tracks government contracts to firms "with histories of misconduct such as contract fraud and environmental, ethics, and labor violations."

Listed at No. 7, POGO [reports](#) that L-3 has been fined some \$43.2M for the “Misappropriation of Proprietary P-3 Aircraft Data; Fraudulent Overbilling on IT Support Services Contracts; False Claims (Iraq Reconstruction); Bribery (Baghdad, Iraq); Court Martial of a Civilian Contractor” and for the “Overbilling on Helicopter Maintenance Contracts in Iraq.”

Not that any of this matters to our corrupt representatives in Congress.

During the 2008 election cycle, L-3’s Political Action Committee handed-out some \$603,839 to compliant officials in Washington, according to the Center for Responsive Politics’ [OpenSecrets.org](#) data base.

Democrats received the lion’s share of the boodle, bagging 64%, while Republicans nabbed only 34% of the firm’s congressional investments. Unsurprisingly, Carl Levin (D-MI), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, scored \$10,000 from the L-3 PAC.

In 2010, the campaign finance watchdogs [report](#) that the L-3 PAC is headed for a new record with \$441,456 already on hand as of January 31, with 66% going to “change” Democrats and 33% to “conservative” Republicans.

All in all, L-3 is a perfect partner for DHS securocrats and congressional regulators, with House Homeland Security Committee chairman, Bennie Thompson (D-MS), pulling down \$10,000 from L-3 to “keep us safe,” according to OpenSecrets.

No matter; billions in federal dollars are at stake for our corporatist masters. As is readily observable every day—from the bank bailout to the ongoing home foreclosure crisis, and from endless wars of aggression to massive domestic spying—the business of government, first, last and always, is business and the American people be damned.

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