

Airport Tyranny: The Introduction of “behavior detection” technology at major US airports

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It's been at least five years since I've flown commercial, and for good reason: I don't wish to be arrested for questioning actions by often arrogant, rude Transportation Security Administration (TSA) workers. Two years ago, my decision was reinforced by my daughter's experience when going through airport security with her two lovebirds. Having shown her ticket and ID to security personnel, and walking toward the metal detector, they started shouting to her, "Miss, you're going to have to take them birds out of the cage." I watched with incredulity as she approached the metal detectors. Fortunately, a TSA worker took the cages and my daughter followed without further incident. Had it been I traveling with the birds, I might have told the TSA workers something that would have gotten me arrested.

James Bovard has an article titled "Federal Attitude Policy" that appears in Freedom Daily (June 2008), a publication of the Fairfax, Va.-based Future of Freedom Foundation. According to the February 2002 Federal Register, people can be arrested if they act in a way that "might distract or inhibit a screener from effectively performing his or her duties ... A screener encountering such a situation must turn away from his or her normal duties to deal with the disruptive individual, which may affect the screening of other individuals." That means it is a federal offense, and a fine of up to \$1,500, for any alleged "nonphysical interference" that makes a TSA screener "turn away" from whatever he was doing.

What's nonphysical interference is solely up to the discretion of a TSA screener since it isn't defined in the regulations. TSA agents can levy fines for a passenger disagreeing with the behavior or arrogance of a screener. The TSA has made little effort to control screener behavior. Bovard reports that in March 2004, airline passengers filed almost 3,000 formal complaints with the federal government over the conduct of TSA screeners. Hundreds have complained about the rudeness of TSA screeners. And yet, none of these passenger complaints resulted in disciplinary measures. In fact, passengers filed four times more complaints against the TSA than against airlines.

But it's going to get worse. The TSA aims to have 500 "behavior detection officers" (BDOs) in airports by the end of this year. The job of the BDOs will be that of examining passengers for "body language and facial cues ... for signs of bad intentions." They look for what the experts call "micro-expressions." Fear and disgust are the key ones, he said, because they're associated with deception. That would make me a prime candidate for scrutiny and possibly trouble because if I ever had to go through airport security procedures, I would have those "micro-expressions" of disgust and fear of arrest.

McClatchy Newspapers reported in an article, "New airport agents check for danger in fliers"

facial expressions,' (August 2007) that Jay Cohen, undersecretary of Homeland Security for Science and Technology, "wants to automate passenger screening by using videocams and computers to measure and analyze heart rate, respiration, body temperature and verbal responses as well as facial micro-expressions.'

Someone who wishes to hijack or destroy a plane will spend considerable time and effort to get around the TSA's attitude-detecting policies. The bulk of the people hassled by these and other TSA procedures are law-abiding Americans who have no malicious intentions, along with a few people traveling with drugs and other contraband. The TSA routinely confiscates about 15,000 items a day from passengers, in addition to the hassle, rudeness and arrogance. With these kind of costs imposed on the traveling public, I'd like TSA to give an account of themselves, namely just how many hijackings or bombings they have prevented, along with the evidence. Americans have been far too compliant and that has given the TSA carte blanche to treat travelers any way they wish. I'm staying away. TSA has its rules and Williams has his, and one of mine is to avoid tyrants and idiots.

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