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Profiling - Who Needs It?

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In the wake of the plot by Islamic terrorists to blow up U.S. airliners over the North Atlantic, the process of checking in at airports has become an excruciatingly painful experience – enough to convince many travelers that a three-day ride on a Greyhound bus might not be such a bad idea. [Flights](#) are cancelled, “mysterious” packages are found in terminals and on airplanes, and lines at security checkpoints grow longer and longer as [airlines](#) recommend that people arrive three to four hours ahead of their scheduled departure time.

In the meantime, as [airline ticket](#) clerks and baggage agents continue to ask the most inane set of questions since Teddy Kennedy was asked if he was sober enough to drive (“Did you pack your own bags? Have your bags been out of your possession at any time? “Did anyone give you anything to carry for them?”), TSA screeners continue to single out 85-year-old grandmothers to see what they might be hiding inside their bras.

And when conservatives, Republicans, and the traveling public demand that TSA screeners demonstrate a bit of common sense by concentrating on young Middle Eastern males, liberals and Democrats throw a hissy-fit about civil rights violations. The fact that essentially every suicide bomber in the last fifty years has been a young Middle Eastern male is inconsequential.

But there is an alternative that may satisfy everyone.

A July 2004 article in the [New York Times](#) reported on interesting new developments in the field of Computerized Voice Stress Analysis (CVSA), an alternative to the standard polygraph test which does not require that the subject be hooked up to a machine. It does not even require that the subject be aware that his/her veracity is being tested, although research shows that the subject’s knowledge of potential jeopardy is helpful in altering voice stress levels.

In an atmosphere where airline officials estimate that it may take as long as three minutes to pass each passenger through a security checkpoint, can we realistically expect the airline industry to survive when it takes 6-9 man-hours of security checks to load a single jumbo jet?

But what of CVSA reliability?

A Florida Department of [Law Enforcement](#) study of August 1994 compared polygraph and CVSA results of interviews with 54 convicted sex offenders. The study concluded that, “With these 54 examinations, there is 100% agreement between the CVSA and the polygraph.”

A three-year study by the U.S. Air Force Research Laboratory, released in October 2000, concluded that “voice stress analysis achieved an accuracy rate of 100% when used to detect stress in 45 known-conclusion responses.”

And in a more recent practical application, the *Times* reports that, in 2004, one British insurance company experienced a 25% reduction in auto theft claims in the first year of using telephonic voice stress analysis.

With the adoption of a comprehensive system of computerized voice stress analysis, the painfully slow process of security checks at airports could be reduced from three minutes, or more, per passenger to only 20-30 seconds, with no racial or ethnic profiling and with no need to dig around inside the bras of 85-year-old grandmothers.

Every passenger would be subject to CVSA screening, a process in which TSA agents could choose from a list of ten or twelve standard questions, such as, “Are you feeling well today? Did you have breakfast today? Are you wearing a red (blue) jacket? Are you on a mission to hurt or kill others? Are your shoes comfortable? Are you looking forward to getting to your final destination? Are you carrying explosives or bomb-making materials? Have you checked some of your baggage? Are you an American citizen? Are you carrying a device that could be used as a weapon?”

Any three of those questions could be selected, asked, and answered in less than thirty seconds.

Although liberals and Democrats have taken steps to outlaw the use of CVSA – the California Penal Code 637.3 states that, “No person or entity in this State shall use any system which examines or records in any manner voice prints or voice stress patterns of another person to determine the truth or falsity of statements made by such person without his or her written consent” – the safety of airline passengers demands that we simply ignore or override their objections.

The Computerized Voice Stress Analyzer can be obtained at a cost of \$10,000 and technicians can be trained for \$1,000, or less. The greatest deterrent to airline terrorism may yet be a small microphone thrust into the faces of would-be terrorists. Racial profiling? Who needs it?