New DHS counterterrorism proposal falls flat

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Leveraging social media posts to identify potential terrorists is a smart move, but the Department of Homeland Security's new plan to ask travelers to volunteer that information is a waste of time; no terrorist will willingly provide that if it threatens their ability to carry out a potential attack.

DHS wants to implement a (http://www.politico.com/story/2016/06/social-media-screening-homeland-security-224786) "plan [that] would prompt travelers to volunteer 'information associated with your online presence,' including the social platforms they use and user names, as part of the official process for entering the country." This new initiative comes in response to the San Bernardino terrorist attack in which it was alleged, after-the-fact, that Tashfeen Malik had expressed support for jihad on social media before being granted entry to America.

(http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/RTX1Z12A_twitter_facebook.jpg)

REUTERS/Dado Ruvic.

Meanwhile, critics suggested that DHS should review the social   … a symbolic

media posts of those seeking entry to the US just like employers routinely do for job applicants. Because social media posts can often times be found on the Internet in an open source environment, a search of applicants could reveal terrorist sympathies.

The proposed plan brings back memories of the two questions flyers used to be asked when they checked in at the airport: have your bags been with you the entire time since you packed them and has anyone asked you to carry anything onto the flight? The first question begged Americans to lie to them and the second question would trip only the dumbest terrorist — as if anyone would answer "no" to the first question or "yes" to the second question. Asking those questions did little to make flying safer. Yet, for years, those two questions were asked millions of times.

Does DHS really believe that an enemy of America will volunteer to provide social media data that could result in them being detected? The proposal is little more than a lame effort to mollify critics with a symbolic plan that won't make America safer and will waste the time and talents of dedicated DHS employees. DHS can and should do better.

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