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## End the Airport Security Charade

By Matt A. Mayer

It looks increasingly likely the Trump administration will [expand the cabin ban on laptops and other large electronics](#) to include all flights to America from Europe. Previously, the ban [covered flights to America from eight countries](#): Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. These countries all possess a geographic nexus to terrorist activity in the Middle East and North Africa. The initial ban covered roughly 50 flights per day.

With the expansion, the ban will cover far more flights and a significant number of travelers, including many American citizens. Specifically, the European travel ban could snag [approximately 65 million travelers](#) a year. Given the covert insertion of terrorists in the massive refugee flows into Europe from Syria and Iraq, as well as the return of European citizens who became foreign fighters for the Islamic State group, security within Europe and on flights emanating from Europe has become suspect, which partially explains the proposed ban.

Both bans are based upon intelligence reports showing both a high level of terrorist interest in bombing a transatlantic flight to America and a growing capability to carry a bomb onto an airplane via a large electronic device using undetectable explosive material. Screening 65 million people to find a handful of bombs is literally akin to finding a needle in a haystack. This reality explains why the federal government is taking an all or nothing approach with large electronics.

The all or nothing approach is not necessary because we simply can't remove hay from the haystack to make it easier to find the terrorist needle; rather, it is required because we refuse to remove most of the hay due to political correctness and an erroneous view that treating people differently is unconstitutional.

Since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack, the focus of policymakers and America's national security apparatus has been on not discriminating against Muslims. By trying to avoid that kind of repugnant discrimination, our policymakers and security entities instead have discriminated against the vast majority of Americans (and non-Americans) who possess not even a scintilla of any nexus to terrorist activity.

We the vast many are subject to screenings, pat-downs, random invasive searches, the confiscation of our possessions and other humiliating actions when everyone knows we are not the target of these activities. Our government puts Lil' Billy, Grandma Ethel and Businessman Bob through a useless

process simply to justify using the same actions against people suspected of being terrorists. We watch handicapped people emasculated, children driven to tears and the elderly pulled aside for secondary screening despite the fact that every person involved in the process and witnessing it knows unequivocally the terrorist risk from those people is zero.

This madness must end. Expanding the electronics ban to European flights doubles down on this failed approach and [creates another safety risk](#) by increasing the number of lithium batteries in the cargo hold. We can, and should, take a smarter approach.

There are two reforms we should institute to focus our time and finite resources on people most likely to pose a threat to our aviation system. First, the federal government should create a free screening process for all Americans that allows us to voluntarily submit whatever data is necessary to fully remove us from the screening process and any electronics ban. This proactive process would be similar to the [TSA Pre-Check system](#), but even better in that approval would allow us to walk through security as easily as we walk through the airport front doors.

If they know most of us pose no risk, why continue the charade of security screenings as if we do? Imagine how much easier traveling would be with this single reform.

The second reform would be to apply screening and bans to people who possess a nexus to countries in which terrorist activity poses a higher risk. This expressly does not mean Muslims. The nexus could be attached to people who:

- Come from certain higher-risk countries;
- travel to and from certain higher-risk countries;
- call or receive calls from certain higher-risk countries;
- send or receive money or mail from certain higher-risk countries;
- send or receive email or texts from certain higher-risk countries;
- and are connected to suspected terrorists on social media apps.

These categories could be narrowed by age and time intervals (e.g., years since last trip to a higher-risk country). A process also must exist for individuals who fall into a category to voluntarily submit data for review to have themselves removed from the screening process and bans.

There may be other, smarter ways based on intelligence data to probe for a nexus to terrorism. Our intelligence community should help flush out those ways so we can dramatically increase the efficiencies and effectiveness of our aviation security.

The point is that most Americans, including many Muslims, wouldn't fall under any of the categories listed above. If that is the case, why should we expend billions of dollars every year on people, equipment, processes and other items to screen people who pose no risk?

Albert Einstein once noted that the definition of insanity was doing the same thing over and over, but expecting a different result. In the 16 years since 9/11, our airport screening process has become more burdensome, not less. First, they took away our liquids (and a snow globe from my crying daughter). Next, they want to take away our laptops and large electronic devices. The final element will be to prevent travelers from taking anything on the airplane at all.

Where does it end? Our government should stop using policies that discriminate against everyone and focus policies on the relatively small group of people who have at least some nexus to terrorist activity.

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