Reform the Transportation Security Administration

Reform of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is long overdue—as the recent passenger backlash against both the TSA's new backscatter full body scanners and the enhanced pat-downs for those who opt out of the machines suggests. These new measures merely attempt to "fight the last war" rather than genuinely increase security for flyers. Meanwhile long lines at airports impose a significant economic cost on the nation and force some people on to the roads, where they are more likely to die in traffic accidents. Racial profiling, which some have suggested, is not the answer, as it is far too blunt a tool to provide genuinely increased security.

Instead, the TSA should be reformed to allow more flexibility and to introduce risk-based security into passenger flights. A comprehensive TSA reform package would have three elements:

- **End the TSA's monopoly on airport screening.** A 2007 study for the TSA found that private screeners consistently outperformed the TSA bureaucrats, so the TSA suppressed it, earning the agency censure from the Government Accountability Office. Airports should be allowed to opt out of the federal system and hire their own screeners, who will be more responsive to customers, and must comply with federal regulations in any event.

- **Remove certain categories of passengers from the intensive screening process.** As international security guru Edward Luttwak put it in a *Wall Street Journal* op ed, "easily recognizable groups that not even the most ingenious terrorists could simulate" should not be viewed as equal in risk to others groups or individuals. Examples include "touring senior citizens traveling together (a category that contains a good portion of all American, European and East Asian tourist traffic), airline flying personnel who come to the security gate as a crew, families complete with children." As Luttwak suggests, the critical question would be whether members of those groups "recognize each other as such."

- **Introduce a robust frequent traveler system.** This would enable members who undergo extensive background checks to bypass certain security checks. Background checks similar to those required for airport workers would be appropriate.

Removing large numbers of travelers from the pool of potential suspects would enable airport screeners to concentrate on those who might pose genuine risks. It would also reduce the number of agents needed, in turn enabling the hiring of more highly qualified personnel, who would treat people as customers rather

than cattle. These reforms would in turn make Israeli-style screening far more achievable, something that might otherwise turn into a tedious box-checking exercise for the agents if it were implemented under the current security regime.

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