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TSA: Groping Grandmas but Giving Arms Traffickers, Terrorists & Drug Dealers a Pass

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WRITTEN BY WILLIAM F. JASPER

WEDNESDAY, 01 DECEMBER 2010 17:20

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The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is spending billions of dollars to install naked full-body scanners at airports, and millions of Americans are facing the humiliation of either a virtual strip search or a private-parts pat-down in order to fly. A regrettable but unavoidable development, right? After all, sacrificing one's dignity, privacy, and constitutional rights is a small price to pay for airline security. That's the government's line anyway. In fact, as far as Department Homeland Security chief Janet Napolitano is concerned, this is just the start; [travelers using mass transit, trains, and boats should also expect soon to experience the same treatment](#). And after that? Why not the same for bus stations, and portable scanners and pat-downs for random highway stops of motorists?

Brian Sullivan, a retired Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) official and a harsh critic of the proliferation of wrongheaded FAA/TSA/DHS security policies since 9/11, [had this to say](#) about the recently instituted body scans and pat-down procedures:

This business about us spending billions on procedures and equipment targeted against the last attack instead of the next one, while it costs them [the terrorists] about \$4,500, will help bankrupt our economy and have an adverse impact on aviation. They must be laughing in their caves as they watch us spin around in reaction to their inexpensive provocations.

How far will Americans go in accepting government intrusion and abuse in the name of security? What's coming next, [body cavity searches for airline passengers?](#)

Surely, that would be too far. But would it seem so after an (alleged) al-Qaeda terrorist employed a body cavity bomb? Would body cavity searches not logically follow, with the "lessons of 9/11" being invoked to attempt to silence all critics of the new invasive "security" procedures?

However, before even considering that abhorrent prospect, before even acquiescing to further groping of grandmas, frisking of four-year-olds, and electronically strip-searching of the entire traveling public, should we not perhaps demand that the FAA/TSA/DHS first target the *obvious* terrorists and security risks? We're not talking about profiling of passengers to spot *potential* terrorists and security risks; we're talking about people who are already identified as terrorists and dangerous criminals *in the FAA's own data banks*.

FAA Pilot Licenses for Terrorists

A private data processing company, [Safe Banking Systems](#), of Long Island, New York, last year uncovered a major security flaw which showed that the FAA had failed to revoke the FAA-approved licenses and certificates for more than a dozen notorious criminals, including convicted terrorists, major drug traffickers, and even a producer of a biological Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD). In June 2009, Safe Banking Systems (SBS) distributed copies of its [23-page report](#) detailing six of the most shocking cases of FAA/TSA failure in this regard to several dozen federal officials, including DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano, Attorney General Eric Holder, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, FAA Administrator J. Randolph Babbitt, and Senators Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), John D. Rockefeller IV (D-W.Va.), Russell Feingold (D-Wis.), Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), and Olympia Snowe (R-Maine).

The six FAA-licensed individuals profiled in the SBS report included:

- [Convicted Lockerbie bombers](#) – Libyan intelligence officers Abdelbaset Ali Elmegrahi and Lamem Khelifa Fhima were convicted of the terrorist bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland in December 1988, killing 270 people. In June 2009 the FAA Certified Airmen Registry still listed both men as holding valid certificates as "aircraft dispatchers." (Elmegrahi was released from prison in August 2009 on compassionate grounds because he reportedly had only three months to live. He returned to Libya to national celebrations and acclaim – and an apparently miraculous recovery. His supposedly terminal cancer went into remission and he was released from the hospital to live at his new state-provided villa.)
- [A Hezbollah arms provider](#) – Fawzi Mustapha Assi was convicted of providing military and aviation equipment to Hezbollah, which has been designated a terrorist organization by the Secretary of State. As of June 2009 he was still listed by the FAA as possessing a valid certificate as a private pilot.
- [Colombian drug traffickers](#) – Gabriel Eduardo Afanador-Solano and his son, Gabriel Eduardo Afanador-Marin are convicted narco-traffickers for the Colombian drug cartel and are both currently

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serving sentences in federal prison in the United States. However, as of June 2009 the FAA Certified Airmen Registry still listed the son as having a valid commercial pilot certificate.

It was not until after the [FAA was questioned about the SBS report](#) by members of the media in June 2009 that the agency revoked the licenses of the six men exposed by Safe Banking Systems. But, as SBS has since pointed out, the FAA has still failed to apply the basic security measures that would reveal the dangerous individuals who continue to hold FAA licenses. Since its initial report of June 2009, SBS has found many additional terrorist and security threats in the FAA's Certified Airmen Registry, including some listed as "Most Wanted" by the FBI.

Thailand's [recent extradition of Viktor Bout](#) to the United States means that the notorious Russian arms trafficker will likely go to trial next year for conspiring to supply FARC, a South American terrorist organization, with surface-to-air missiles and other weapons. But almost completely lost in the reporting on the Viktor Bout case is the astounding fact that this "Merchant of Death" and seven of his associates in his global air transport network [hold valid FAA licenses](#).

The New American has reported on Viktor Bout's activities a number of times, noting in [an October 2008 story](#) that:

Most news reports on "Viktor B," as he is known in arms-trafficking and intelligence circles, describe Bout as a "former KGB agent" who is now a freelance businessman. However, he is one of the old Soviet hands who have enabled the "new" Russia of Putin & Company to carry on the old Kremlin program of spreading global revolution, terror, and chaos under a shallow veneer of deniability. But his cover is so thin that only the completely naïve or willfully blind could believe his "I'm just a capitalist doing business" line. Bout, who has been on "wanted" lists worldwide for years, runs his many front companies and global air transport operations out of Moscow and uses multiple Russian passports under a variety of aliases. This protective sanctuary under the aegis of Putin's KGB-FSB regime, together with Bout's apparent ties to Russia's military intelligence (the old Soviet GRU), through which he obtains the arms for his customers, provides a few "clues" to the sensible that "Viktor B" is still an intelligence operative working for his old Kremlin masters.

It is perfectly understandable that the Russian government would cover for Viktor Bout and his associates, but what excuses can our government give for failing to exercise due diligence in this matter? Not only common sense, but also federal law (14 CFR Parts 61, 63, and 65) dictate that FAA certificates be revoked for persons who pose a security threat. Yet, Viktor Bout, who was for years one of the "most wanted" criminal fugitives on the planet, even now, apparently, retains his FAA-approved pilot's license. In addition, Viktor Bout's business associate and personal physician, a Belgian doctor by the name of [Johann Piret](#), was an FAA Designated Medical Examiner for nearly three decades, until 2007.

Then there is notorious drug kingpin [Fernando Zevallos Gonzalez](#), called the "Al Capone of Peru" by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency. He also holds an FAA-approved license, according to SBS. There is also the case of [Joseph Mahmoud Dibee](#), who was indicted along with 10 others in 2006 for acts of terrorism associated with the Animal Liberation Front and Earth Liberation Front. He is believed by the FBI to have fled to Syria, a major state sponsor of terrorist organizations. As of June 2009, Dibee still had his FAA-approved pilot's license, as do a dozen or so members of Osama bin Laden's family.

"Nothing has changed"

It goes on and on. The FAA/TSA/DHS demand vast new invasive powers, huge budgets, and expensive high-tech equipment to keep us "secure," but can't (or won't) police their own houses and correct their own blatant derelictions of duty that constitute a genuine threat to America.

The Obama administration's proposed DHS budget for 2011 came in at [\\$56.3 billion](#). The TSA, which is part of the DHS, has an annual budget of over \$8 billion dollars and more than 56,000 employees. The FAA boasts an annual budget of nearly \$16 billion and employs more than 45,000. Yet these behemoths, with their massive resources, technology, and personnel, are apparently incapable of identifying well-known terrorists and international criminals and removing them from "approved" status in their own data banks.

But Safe Banking Systems, a small, family-owned security consulting business in Mineola, New York, was able to zero in on the bureaucracy's glaring security gaps with relative ease. "Because SBS does not have access to confidential government watchlists, we make use of 'open source intelligence' that is publicly available on the internet," said David Schiffer, the President of Safe Banking Systems, in his foreword to the aforementioned SBS June 2009 *FAA Airmen Registry Report*. "Our tests ran for approximately two hours and yielded several alarming potential matches. After four days of further investigation, by just one member of our staff, a dozen matches were confirmed beyond any doubt," he noted.

That was nearly a year and a half ago. Unfortunately, the FAA and TSA still have not cleaned up their act. In September 2010, Schiffer told [The Enterprise Report](#) that "despite the assurances of the TSA and FAA, nothing has changed since we first began exposing this issue last year." He went on to say that "despite the fact they we have identified over two-dozen suspect pilots with backgrounds who seem to clearly present a threat to aviation and national security, nothing seems to have changed."




In a November 30 interview with *The New American*, Schiffer said that it remains "astonishing" to him that the agencies involved have remained so resistant to change and continue to fail to plug the security gaps that SBS has exposed. "TSA says they scrub 4 million names a day with their system," he noted, but they still haven't revoked the licenses of dozens of individuals whom SBS has exposed.

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Photo: rotator graphic and above: A Transportation Security Administration (TSA) officer pats down an elderly traveler as he works his way through security at San Francisco International Airport, Nov. 24, 2010: AP Images

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