

"Writing the truth
as I see it;
trying not to
offend
those who will
disagree."

The truth as I see it™

Idaho Common Sense™



Craig L. Bosley, MD

“Humans are more important than hardware”

January 11, 2010

On Christmas day, a Nigerian man boarded Northwest Flight 253 from Amsterdam to Detroit with a bomb he planned to detonate over the United States, his success prevented more by luck than skill.

The president responded saying there were “human and system failures” and the United States will do “whatever it takes” to defeat the terrorists, a few days ago adding that we need more body scanners in airports.

Could the president be focusing on the wrong solution to the right problem? Is he correct assuming we need more scanners, more technology and more congressional appropriations? We react to each new threat with purchases of ever-more expensive technology, determined if we spend enough money and buy enough equipment we can find anything.

Perhaps our military Special Forces teams understand something we and our president do not—“humans are more important than hardware.” Israel figured this out over 30 years ago and started using trained personnel at their airports to profile people. Yes, profiling, even though the ACLU and the politically correct would have us believe any type of profiling is unconstitutional.

Although correct that racial or religious profiling is unconstitutional, behavioral profiling is not, and that is what Israel has mastered. Tel Aviv’s Ben Gurion Airport has not had a serious terrorist threat for more than 30 years. Why? Rafi Ron, the former head of security at Ben Gurion, says

Israel profiles people by their behavior—“passengers with illegitimate, violent agendas don’t act normally.” And that’s the key to security success.

Ron explains that our country feels “comfortable with the use of technology which is politically safe for everybody,” but fails to provide a good level of security. And we do so at the risk of American lives.

Israel is not foolish enough to rely on racial or religious profiling, knowing the terrorists would simply alter their recruiting efforts to individuals who would not fit those profiles. They understand the need to behaviorally profile all passengers.

An excellent example occurred in 1986 when a young pregnant Irish woman was flying from London to Israel. An Israeli security agent engaged her in pleasant conversation. The reason? Pregnant women usually do not travel long distances alone. Her inconsistent and evasive answers led to a more detailed interrogation, revealing a bomb in her luggage. Behavioral profiling found what neither racial nor religious profiling could.

Ron points out we need to screen passengers more than we need to screen for the weapons they use. A TSA analyst watching the video of the 9/11 terrorists going through security lines at Dulles airport pointed out that they avoided direct eye contact with security personnel, keeping their head and gazes down. But American airport security personnel could not have engaged these men in conversation

to determine if further evaluation was needed. Our security regulations say that would be discriminatory, and therefore unconstitutional.

But our Constitution does not prevent behavioral profiling. Approaching these men based on their behavior would have been neither racial nor religious profiling. It would have just been common sense.

Behavioral profiling works and the Israelis have proved it works. So, it’s time for the U.S. government to train airport security personnel in behavioral analysis, allowing them to approach passengers and engage them in polite, revealing conversation—tastefully, tactfully and legally.

The TSA does not need more technology; it needs more personnel appropriately trained to spot behaviors needing further investigation. Some people will continue to claim that behavioral profiling is discriminatory because a disproportionately small number of children and little old ladies will be searched. But this actually proves behavioral profiling works because it leads to selecting passengers most appropriate for more interaction.

Isn’t it time to provide real airport security rather than giving us a politically correct false sense of security? Mr. President, please do not spend more money on a flawed system when a clearly superior, proven system exists. Learn from your Special Forces. “Humans are more important than hardware.”

Dr. Craig Bosley is an emergency physician practicing in Pocatello, Idaho. His column appears in the Idaho State Journal each Monday. If you would like to contact him directly, you can email him at craig@craigbosley.com. His columns are available at www.craigbosley.com and podcasts of his columns are available at www.craigbosley.com/podcast.

© copyright, Craig L. Bosley, MD, 2010