

The Association of Independent Aviation Security Professionals

Promoting the Adoption of Meaningful Aviation Security Measures

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The Terrorist Identifications Datamart Environment (TIDE): What would be the effect of automatically designating all persons listed in TIDE for secondary high security screening prior to boarding US carrier flights at foreign airports?

After the attempted bombing of Northwest Flight 253, federal officials were quoted to the effect that the perpetrator, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, had previously been entered in TIDE, the National Counterterrorism Center's global list of persons known or suspected to have connections to terrorism. Despite his inclusion in TIDE, Abdulmutallab was not designated for additional physical screening prior to boarding Flight 253 at Amsterdam because, according to officials, TIDE listed some 550,000 persons and this large population made it impractical or impossible to use as a basis for designating airline passengers for intensive preboard screening.

In a separate paper, AIASP has analyzed the effects on screening checkpoints in US airports. This paper deals with the likely effects on the preboard screening for US carrier flights departing from foreign airports.

We make an assumption that 60% of the 550,000 persons listed in TIDE reside outside the United States. Of that 330,000, a large proportion will never fly to the United States, out of fear of being arrested here, or because they would not obtain entry visas. Most of the remainder would only rarely fly to the United States. In addition, some of the 220,000 that are US residents might be on return flights to the United States. Of those who do fly to the United States, half would likely fly on foreign flag carriers. Taking these factors into account, we estimate that at most, one out of a thousand, or a total of 550, would fly to the United States on US carrier flights on any day. Since there are hundreds of such flights daily, the additional number of passengers needing high intensity secondary screening would be on the order of one per flight per day. We therefore conclude that the additional burden of automatically designating persons listed in TIDE for high intensity secondary screening would be negligible.

As is the case for flights from US airports, the foregoing analysis and its optimistic conclusions could be quite inaccurate, if TIDE has a significant problem of similar or identical names causing false selection of passengers. In time, however, the use of additional distinguishing data, such as gender and date of birth, may reduce the false selections. Another consideration is that the 550,000 listed persons may include many who indeed have associations with terrorism, but are in no way hostile toward the United States. Also over time, the TIDE list should be combed to provide a shorter, more soundly based list for aviation security purposes. Lastly, any of the 550,000 who are put on no-fly lists would of course not need to be screened.