

JOHN PISTOLE WANTS US TO BE AFRAID OF HIS SHADOW

I'm working on a longer post on John Pistole, the head of Transportation Security Administration who ordered the TSA to touch your junk.

But in the meantime I wanted to point out something appalling about his recent testimony to the Senate Commerce Committee. In it, he says the following to justify expanding the use of air marshal patrols at mass transit locations.

Another recent case highlights the importance of mass transit security. On October 27, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) arrested a Pakistan-born naturalized U.S. citizen for attempting to assist others whom he believed to be members of al Qaida in planning multiple bombings at Metrorail stations in the Washington, D.C., area. During a sting operation, Farooque Ahmed allegedly conducted surveillance of the Arlington National Cemetery, Courthouse, and Pentagon City Metro stations, indicated that he would travel overseas for jihad, and agreed to donate \$10,000 to terrorist causes. A federal grand jury in Alexandria, Virginia, returned a three-count indictment against Ahmed, charging him with attempting to provide material support to a designated terrorist organization, collecting information to assist in planning a terrorist attack on a transit facility, and attempting to provide material support to help carry out multiple bombings to cause mass casualties at D.C.-area Metrorail stations.

While the public was never in danger, Ahmed's intentions provide a reminder of

the terrorist attacks on other mass transit systems: Madrid in March 2004, London in July 2005, and Moscow earlier this year. Our ability to protect mass transit and other surface transportation venues from evolving threats of terrorism requires us to explore ways to improve the partnerships between TSA and state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement, and other mass transit stakeholders. These partnerships include measures such as Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response (VIPR) teams we have put in place with the support of the Congress.

Pistole suggests we need to be worried about mass transit attacks because Ahmed Farooque was arrested for planning what he thought was an al Qaeda attack on the DC area Metro.

But of course—as Pistole concedes—there was never an attack. Instead, there was an FBI sting, set up back when Pistole was still at the FBI. We have zero indication that Farooque would have targeted the Metro on his own, and even less that that’s what al Qaeda is currently targeting. Nevertheless, Pistole chooses to point to it—a planned attack entirely of the FBI’s own making—as a reminder of the threat to mass transit.

Now I’m not suggesting that our subway and rail systems aren’t exposed to attack. Indeed, that’s part of the reason why the “gate rape” to get on airplanes is so absurd, given how unprotected rail transport is by comparison. (Though a smart terrorist would probably choose another kind of venue entirely—like a football game or Wal-Mart on Black Friday—for an attack.)

But I am suggesting it is absolutely inappropriate for Pistole to point to the FBI’s own—his own—sting as evidence that we need to increase domestic surveillance. Next thing you know, the FBI will stage a sting involving Disney World so it can justify strip-searching

children before they see Mickey.

Update: Pistole is out with a new statement suggesting he may back down.

We welcome feedback and comments on the screening procedures from the traveling public, and we will work to make them as minimally invasive as possible while still providing the security that the American people want and deserve. We are constantly evaluating and adapting our security measures, and as we have said from the beginning, we are seeking to strike the right balance between privacy and security. In all such security programs, especially those that are applied nation-wide, there is a continual process of refinement and adjustment to ensure that best practices are applied and that feedback and comment from the traveling public is taken into account. This has always been viewed as an evolving program that will be adapted as conditions warrant, and we greatly appreciate the cooperation and understanding of the American people.

We cannot forget that less than one year ago a suicide bomber with explosives in his underwear tried to bring down a plane over Detroit. The terrorists allegedly behind the thwarted cargo attempt last month are out there bragging about how they will strike again.

We all wish we lived in a world where security procedures at airports weren't necessary but that just isn't the case.
[my emphasis]

But his logic still amounts to "we need to feel up granny to try to find explosives worn by a terrorist entering the US from a place where they don't feel up granny and because terrorists threaten to use the still-unsecured package

shipping system.” That is, “because we’re not prepared to get the real terrorists’ flying or sending packages, we have to feel up granny.”