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## Debate Over Full-Body Scans vs. Invasion of Privacy Flares Anew After Incident

By [JOHN SCHWARTZ](#)

Editors' Note Appended

The technology exists to reveal objects hidden under clothes at airport checkpoints, and many experts say it would have detected the explosive packet carried aboard the Detroit-bound flight last week. But it has been fought by privacy advocates who say it is too intrusive, leading to a newly intensified debate over the limits of security.

Screening technologies with names like [millimeter-wave and backscatter X-ray](#) can show the contours of the body and reveal foreign objects. Such machines, properly used, are a leap ahead of the metal detectors used in most airports, and supporters say they are necessary to keep up with the plans of potential terrorists.

"If they'd been deployed, this would pick up this kind of device," [Michael Chertoff](#), the former homeland security secretary, said in an interview, referring to the packet of chemicals hidden in the underwear of the Nigerian man who federal officials say tried to blow up the Northwest Airlines flight.

But others say that the technology is no security panacea, and that its use should be carefully controlled because of the risks to privacy, including the potential for its ghostly naked images to show up on the Internet.

"The big question to our country is how to balance the need for personal privacy with the safety and security needs of our country," said Representative [Jason Chaffetz](#), a Utah Republican who sponsored a successful [measure in the House](#) this year to require that the devices be used only as a secondary screening method and to set punishments for government employees who copy or share images. (The bill has not passed in the Senate.)

"I'm on an airplane every three or four days; I want that plane to be as safe and secure as possible," Mr. Chaffetz said. However, he added, "I don't think anybody needs to see my 8-year-old naked in order to secure that airplane."

Full-body imaging machines are in use in 19 airports in the United States and are being used as the primary method of screening at six. Earlier this year the [Transportation Security Administration](#) announced plans to buy 150 more machines and to use the scanners as the primary screening method for air passengers.

That prompted a letter of protest from a coalition of 24 privacy organizations to Homeland Security Secretary

[Janet Napolitano](#), including the [Electronic Privacy Information Center](#) and the [American Civil Liberties Union](#).

“Your agency will be capturing the naked photographs of millions of American air travelers suspected of no wrongdoing,” the letter said.

Images produced by the machines in the days before privacy advocates began using phrases like “digital strip search” could be startlingly detailed. Machines used in airports today, however, protect privacy to a greater extent, said Kristin Lee, a spokeswoman for the T.S.A.

Depending on the specific technology used, faces might be obscured or bodies reduced to the equivalent of a chalk outline. Also, the person reviewing the images must be in a separate room and cannot see who is entering the scanner. The machines have been modified to make it impossible to store the images, Ms. Lee said, and the procedure “is always optional to all passengers.” Anyone who refuses to be scanned “will receive an equivalent screening”: a full pat-down.

Since the Christmas Day bombing attempt, supporters of tighter security have raised their voices in criticism of privacy advocates. “I do think the privacy groups have some explaining to do,” said Stewart A. Baker, a former homeland security official in the administration of President [George W. Bush](#).

However, he added, body imaging technology has its limits — the machines cannot, for example, detect objects stowed in bodily orifices or concealed within the folds of an obese person’s flesh.

[Bruce Schneier](#), a security expert who has been critical of the technology, said the latest incident had not changed his mind.

“If there are a hundred tactics and I protect against two of them, I’m not making you safer,” he said. “If we use full-body scanning, they’re going to do something else.”

The millions of dollars being spent on new equipment, he said, would be better invested in investigation and intelligence work to detect bombers before they get to any airport.

Marc Rotenberg, head of the Electronic Privacy Information Center, said his group had not objected to the use of the devices, as long as they were designed not to store and record images.

Mr. Chertoff said he found such statements a “strategic retreat” from more strident positions taken before last week’s terrorism attempt. He acknowledged that “nothing is 100 percent,” but added, “The more difficult you make it for someone to conceal weapons, the fewer people who are going to be willing or capable of concealment” and the harder it would be to make effective weapons.

Editors' Note: January 15, 2010

Articles on Dec. 28, 29 and 30, about the apparent bombing attempt on a flight to Detroit, discussed the use of full-body scanners for airport security. They cited Michael Chertoff, the former secretary of homeland security, as supporting wider use of the scanners. Mr. Chertoff has confirmed in several recent interviews that a manufacturer of the devices is a client of his consulting company. That connection should have been noted in the articles.

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