To Prevent Airport Terror Strengthen Screening of All Travelers

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The best way to prevent airborne terrorist attacks may be to improve the baseline security screening of all air travelers rather than identifying and screening high-risk passengers, according to new research by experts at MIT and Harvey Mudd College.

The findings are included in a new paper, "How Effective is Security Screening of Airline Passengers?" by Professors Susan E. Martonosi, Department of Mathematics at Harvey Mudd College, and Arnold Barnett, Operations Research Center, Sloan School of Management at MIT.

The paper will appear in the journal *Interfaces*, published by the Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences (INFORMS), whose December 2006 issue is dedicated to homeland security topics. This special issue will be distributed to multiple contacts within the Bush Administration and Congress.

The paper is based on the principles of Operations Research (OR), a discipline that uses advanced analytical methods grounded in mathematics to make better decisions. From police dispatching to how the Pentagon deploys troops to how medical professionals stop outbreaks of disease, OR is a powerful, behind-the-scenes force that impacts our daily lives.

Today, the US Transportation Security Administration is developing the "Secure Flight" program, a passenger-profiling system to identify

terrorists before they board. However, Martonosi and Barnett's paper found that a more effective way to prevent terror attacks might be to focus instead on improving the X-ray, metal and explosives detection technology used on all travelers and their luggage, even though those measures are time-consuming.

The research reignites the debate that has simmered since the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001: Which is more important--preventing another terrorist attack or enabling Americans to fly with the least possible delay? Where is the balance between airport security and travelers' convenience?

Source: Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences

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