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# Do Government Shut Downs Shut Down Aviation Security?

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## Do Government Shut Downs Shut Down Aviation Security?

There have been reports of a growing number of Transportation Security Administration (TSA) agents calling in sick and refusing to work for no pay (1). The immediate question becomes, what's the impact on aviation security? The answer is a negative one, but not as negative as one might think, and one only adding to festering, pre-shutdown problems.

Aviation security begins with the collection and analysis of intelligence to identify various *threats*. These *threats* are prioritized by their likelihood of occurrence, how they match up with *vulnerabilities*, and their estimated consequences leading to assessments of *risk*. Finite human, technological, infrastructural, research and developmental, and financial resources are then allocated by decision makers based on counter-threat expertise and political pressures and values. The resulting layered approach to aviation security includes (a) information operations to decrease the number of people who wish to engage in violating some public's welfare through an attack; (b) information operations to reinforce the psychological resilience of the general public given that noxious psychological effect is often the ultimate goal of terrorism and non-political attacks against aviation; (c) counterintelligence activities so that people behind the threats have the wrong information and make the wrong decisions in their operational and support planning and implementation; (d) apprehension of these people well before an operation is launched; and (e) placement and use of various human and technical resources adjacent to and within airports to identify and apprehend people and weapons/weapon components before the latter are deployed and employed. As intelligence continues to be collected and analyzed—and transmitted in a timely and secure fashion to security authorities with a need-to-know—layers of aviation security should be continuously changing. After all, threat, vulnerability, and risk are continuously changing, as is the world itself.

As is obvious from the above, TSA agents are a small, if important, piece of a multi-disciplinary aviation security capability. And this piece is under significant psychological pressure beyond that inherent to security responsibilities. As there are fewer agents available—through calling in sick or quitting—the workload increases for the others or security procedures are compromised to do the best possible with the agents available. As well, the mental challenge of observing, analyzing and acting on observations, and complying with task criteria is compromised. This occurs through mental intrusions of financial worry, anxiety about caring for one's family and self, noxious emotions about insensitive treatment by a large bureaucracy, and fantasies of revenge and what might have been if different events had occurred in their lives.

Unfortunately, these intrusions are not new, even if they may be exacerbated with the shutdown. Optimal human resource management—e. g., attractive salary, respect and dignity allocated by higher-ups—has never occurred in the history of TSA as

substantiated by high annual personnel turnover (2). What's different now is the pile-on from the need for some agents to use food banks, unpaid pills, admonitions not to speak with journalists, increasing charged expenses and incurring of credit card increases, and formal Homeland Security letters that are not honored requesting special treatment by creditors. So the TSA insider threat continues to increase—whether through absenteeism, subpar performance, or outright sabotage and subverting the mission.

However, the shutdown is not shutting down aviation security at the moment, and probably not in the short term. A silver lining in the shutdown cloud might be turning the page towards treating TSA agents how they should be treated. As with many service providers in many locations, like elementary and secondary school teachers, who provide important services to the public, this is not something expected. Token ad hoc stipends and such may be all that's expected.

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**Keywords:** Aviation. Information. Intelligence. Risk. Security. Threat. Transportation Security Administration. Vulnerability.

**Abstract/Description:** This article describes some consequences of the ongoing United States Government shutdown on aviation security.

**Disciplines:** Other Psychology, Philosophy, Philosophy of Science. Political Science, Other Political Science, Psychology, Defense and Security Studies, International Relations

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