

4-18-2003

Trends. Aviation Security: Thinking About CAPPs, CAPPs II, and Beyond

Editor

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Recommended Citation

Editor (2003) "Trends. Aviation Security: Thinking About CAPPs, CAPPs II, and Beyond," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 14 : Iss. 13 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol14/iss13/5>

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International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: Trends. Aviation Security: Thinking About CAPPs, CAPPs II, and Beyond

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Volume: 14

Issue: 13

Date: 2003-04-18

Keywords: Aviation Security, CAPPs

Abstract: This Trends article discusses computer assisted passenger prescreening systems (CAPPs) and aviation security.

In aviation security, computer assisted passenger prescreening systems (CAPPs) are ultimately intended to predict human behavior--viz., engaging in security violations of serious enough consequence to merit the development of CAPPs. The public discourse on CAPPs largely focuses on privacy concerns. While a crucial Issue within a representative democracy or other political entity that values what traditionally has been conceived as the classical philosophy of liberalism, privacy should not crowd out the public discourse market to the disadvantage of CAPPs accuracy.

However, CAPPs accuracy is already at a disadvantage because too specific a discourse can compromise CAPPs accuracy. For example, publicly addressing the contents and merits of putative CAPPs criteria, such as how a ticket is purchased; whether countries with active terrorism activities and support have been visited; and whether community rootedness can be demonstrated through data base searches activated by a passenger's name, address, date of birth, and phone number allow operators from sophisticated terrorist networks and criminal organizations to plan to look like they do not present a significant security risk. Yet, a strong case can be made that free and open discussion and refereed analysis often yield superior applied scientific products than the close-heldness of the classified world.

So, what to do? As CAPPs becomes ever more sophisticated and accurate, so does the required sophistication of terrorists and other criminals to achieve success. And less and less of the non-sophisticated who seek to engage in security violators can be successful. The fact remains, however, that the difficulty of initial validation and of the ongoing analysis required to maintain appropriate validity might render an appropriately accurate CAPPs but a pipe dream--at least according to the tenets of common scientific method. CAPPs would then join polygraphy as to security mirrors of the soul that only yield our own reflection. (See Burns, M. K., Dean, V. J., & Jacob-Timm, S. (2001). Assessment of violence potential among school children: Beyond profiling. *Psychology in the Schools*, 38, 239-247; Horton, A. (2002). Violent crimes and racial profiling: What the evidence suggests. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 6, 87-106; Kocsis, R. N., Hayes, A. F., & Irwin, H. J. (2002). Investigative experience and accuracy in psychological profiling of a violent crime. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 17, 811-823; Palermo, G.B. (2002). Criminal profiling: The uniqueness of the killer. *International Journal of Offender Therapy & Comparative Criminology*, 46, 383-385; Simon, H. (April 2, 2003). TSA supports congressional restrictions on computerized airline passenger screening. *Aviation Week's Homeland Security & Defense*, pp. 1-2.) (Keywords: Aviation Security, CAPPs.)