

Search:

[NYTimes.com](#) > [Opinion](#)

## Shortchanging Security

**T**he Associated Press headline picked up by newspapers across the country last week said it all: "Air Marshal Program Could Be Cut, Despite Hijacking Threat." That was not exactly welcome news to millions of Americans at the height of the summer travel season, and the ensuing uproar helped kill the proposed spending cuts. Yet sadly enough, the story line was all too familiar. The Bush administration and Congressional leaders in Washington have been too reluctant to devote enough resources to protect the nation against terrorism.

A sense of complacency at this time would be inexcusable under any circumstances, but it is reckless when intelligence points to the likelihood of more terrorist attacks on aviation. President Bush called it a "real threat" at his press conference last week. The government is so concerned, it now requires travelers who need a visa to visit the United States to obtain one when merely changing planes here, say, en route to Paris from Rio.

Federal airport screeners and airlines have also been put on notice that Al Qaeda terrorists may be adapting cameras or other electronic devices into weapons. Aviation security has been substantially upgraded since the Sept. 11 attacks, but airliners remain the most alluring terrorist target all the same.

That is why it would be so wrong to roll back the air marshal program now. As the mounting threats were disclosed, a leaked memo from an official with the federal air marshal service cited budgetary concerns in urging regional offices to drop flights requiring overnight stays. The war on terror, apparently, must be waged on a day trip.

On Sunday, appearing on the NBC News program "Meet the Press," Tom Ridge, Homeland Security Secretary, conceded that the juxtaposition of proposed spending cuts and new threats amounted to an "unusual sequence of events." We'll say. He then reassured viewers that there would be no curtailment in the air marshal program that puts thousands of undercover law-enforcement agents on an undisclosed number of flights.

Mr. Ridge did not address the budgetary constraints faced by the Transportation Security Administration, the agency within his department established in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 attacks. The agency has received nearly \$1 billion less than it has sought from Congress, forcing layoffs and the postponement of air marshal training.

Inadequate resources have also been devoted to the securing of airport perimeters and cargo facilities, not to mention ports and energy plants. These needs must be addressed.

### ARTICLE TOOLS

-  [E-Mail This Article](#)
-  [Printer-Friendly Format](#)
-  [Most E-Mailed Articles](#)

ARTICLE TOOLS SPONSORED BY SPRINT  
[E-mail this article to your PCS Phone](#)

### READERS' OPINIONS

- [Forum: Join a Discussion on Today's Editorials](#)

### TIMES NEWS TRACKER

Topics	Alerts
<a href="#">Airlines and Airplanes</a>	
<a href="#">Terrorism</a>	
<a href="#">Transportation Security Administration</a>	

- ▶ [Create Your Own](#)    ▶ [Manage](#)
- ▶ [Most Popular Alerts](#)    ▶ [Take a Tour](#)

[CLICK HERE TO SUBSCRIBE](#) 

---

**RELATED ARTICLES**

---

- [U.S. Agency Scales Back Data Required On Air Travel](#) (July 31, 2003)
- [Government Issues New Terror Warning](#) (July 30, 2003)
- [Airlines Coveting Baghdad, If Airport Can Be Made Safe](#) (July 29, 2003) \$
- [THREATS AND RESPONSES: SAUDI CONCERNS; A Top Saudi to Meet With Bush; 9/11 Report Is the Likely Topic](#) (July 29, 2003) \$
- [THREATS AND RESPONSES; 8 Killed in Saudi Sweep Against Militants](#) (July 29, 2003) \$

Find more results for [Airlines and Airplanes](#) and [Terrorism](#) .

---

**TOP OPINION ARTICLES**

---

- [Shortchanging Security](#)
- [The Jakarta Bombing](#)
- [Karl Rove's Water Policy](#)
- [Piers as Parks Downtown](#)
- [The Quest for a Peaceful Death \(5 Letters\)](#)