

Leaving the Country? US Marshalls May Demand an Iris Scan From You

February 27, 2017 - It probably goes without saying that most governments want to know who is entering their borders. And it shouldn't really be a surprise that when you travel to another country, that nation's immigration services may want some information about you. They'll take your passport and examine it. They'll engage you in conversation to see how you react. You may even be singled out for secondary screening. In a worst case scenario, you may be strip searched. But, you are in another country and subject to their rules, so you'll likely comply with all of their requests. But what would you think if the United States started to do intrusive searches when you are leaving the country? Well, it looks like that has already started to happen.

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I periodically read a blog called Zerohedge. Yesterday, they posted a piece written by an American who was traveling to Mexico from Atlanta. After he had gone through all of the standard airport security and made it all the way to the boarding ramp of his flight, he found out that there was an added security hurdle he needed to get by.

There were two US Marshall some distance down the boarding ramp. Every single passenger was forced to give them an iris scan prior to being allowed to board the flight. This raises some very disturbing privacy questions. It also brings to mind images of things that all American grew up to detest a few short years ago.

Questioning this only from a privacy perspective, what's the purpose of collecting iris scans? One has to imagine that they are being stored in some federal database. It could be that they are going into the FBI's database; which as of the middle of last year contained iris scans on nearly half a million Americans. But why? Why should the government be allowed to store your most personal data on a whim? I understand the need if you are applying for a security clearance. I can even understand it if you are applying for some sort of professional license that requires a criminal background check. But a scan for anyone who is simply boarding a flight seems a bit much.

And since according to the article, marshals were pairing the iris scans with scans of passports, there is no doubt that the information collected can be used by the government in the future.

Perhaps all of this is a bit of an overreaction. After all, when you walk into any American airport to board a flight, you know pretty well what you are in for. Stand in line, take off your shoes, put everything other than your driver's license in a bin and have it X-rayed. Behind the scenes, airport have you on camera the entire time you are there and they are running facial recognition software looking for people that shouldn't be there.

On top of those intrusions, if you have elected to join the TSA's preboarding program, you've already agreed to a background check, to give up your fingerprints and you may have also already given them an iris scan.

But choosing to give up your privacy and being forced to are two completely different things. Consider this. Researcher's at Carnegie Mellon University say that they are now able to positively identify people using their iris scans from 40 feet away and even by using a reflection in a mirror. That should trouble us all.

byJim Malmberg

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