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# Identity card is US maritime hobgoblin

The identity card for US transportation workers has been an expensive disaster in technical and civil liberty terms, and has brought no discernible security benefits



Restricted access: the TWIC card wastes billions of dollars and does not demonstrably increase the security of ports, vessels or people.

**F**OR a US seafarer, a Transportation Worker Identification Credential, or “TWIC Card” or just “TWIC”, is a necessary accoutrement. It gives the warm feeling that things are under control. The TWIC was imposed by the Department of Homeland Security, overseeing the Transportation Security Administration. These are the blank faces of the organs of state security that seafarers encounter.

The TWIC is an obscenely expensive, delusional and nakedly bizarre failure. It wastes billions of unaffordable dollars, and it does not demonstrably increase the security of ports, vessels or people. It should be abolished now.

Other existing and proven methods can readily be used. Those methods are run by people knowledgeable about maritime. The TWIC is all about misguided bureaucrats, technology, lobbyists and money searching for a mission.

There is full fallacy in the TWIC exercise. In philosophy it is called the foundational fallacy. One cannot rely on arguments coming from a complex foundation of facts or events. The argument must fail. Why? One cannot account for every variation in the future from the time the foundation was laid. Fatal errors unavoidably creep in and persist.

The TWIC, which is supposed to be perfected to keep theoretical terrorists from theoretical ports, will always fail.

The TSA crowd knows nothing about the industry. It administers cosy contracts with equally unknowing contractors.

Thus it came to pass that the TSA became the Monty Python of seaports. Existing and proven systems would have worked with minimal tinkering. The professional US Coast Guard should run all port security programmes. Never mind easily done record searches or common sense. But Congress listened to the lobbyists: we dullard wharf rats cannot possibly understand technology.

As American lecturer, essayist and poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson, pointed out, that the hobgoblin of little minds lies in dull and mindless routine. The TWIC is a maritime hobgoblin reified in the TSA.

The leading contractor for the TWIC was defence aeroplane manufacturer Lockheed-Martin. The aim was not to help in anti-terrorism but to bring another \$1bn in revenue by selling a bill of goods for things unproven.

Lockheed understood the foundational fallacy — if a computer can do it, it will be effective and therefore good, and therefore solves the problem — with sufficient funds.

Then the geeks designing TWIC ignored federal guidelines for identification cards. The initial system was so cumbersome that it took a PhD in computer science to obtain a password for the website to register.

The inevitable cost excesses came. A tactic of every defence contractor is to buy in at low cost and then make up the losses by change orders. Lockheed held the government hostage for work done.

Then the reports of civil liberties abuses arose. Government auditing arms found TWIC a near-disaster. Recently came the strident shouting of TSA Administrator John Pistole, the FBI hack who proclaimed “We will not back down!” when the public protested at airport genital gropings. We await that tactic in ports with interest.

Clearly, neither the empress nor her king has clothes when Mr Pistole and the speechifying Secretary Janet Napolitano say all is well with the TWIC.

The technology for a TWIC card reader cannot be produced and will not be for years. Every credit card company has secure card readers. They deal in the real

world of commerce, not the fear-mongering world of TSA Cassandras. They also accept reasonable risks of fraud. Why cannot the TSA and its contractor bedfellows produce a reader that works?

The security response to the need is not rocket science. The TSA clearly needs brains and not more defence technology to hide its bovine mooing and ovine bleating.

Other abuses came. If a name did not fit a form devised in 1898, the TSA made one up. Hyphens? Un-American. Two middle initials? Un-American. All this was for the enlightenment of a gate guard at 0300 hrs in the driving rain to read, vet and compare to other credentials. No match. You do not come in. TSA idiocy.

The pressure was put on. Assaults by contractor clerks were reported when applicants pointed out that the card was false identification when not conforming to credentials. Criminal complaints have been said to have been diverted for “national security”. A DHS spokesman reportedly said: “If that is your name, you do not get a TWIC.” A DHS mouthpiece telling a certificated seafarer his livelihood is endangered because of a wrong form of his name on a TWIC card? Unbridled hubris.

Then there is biometry, the supposed keystone. No one can define, measure, put it on a card or read it electronically accurately all the time to compare to the outdated databases run by the security weenies. No one has figured out how to make it comply with the international objectives for seafarer identification.

The TWIC is useless outside the US. In the US, reports are legion of airport TSA automatons rejecting it. One report says it is unacceptable for entering US Coast Guard headquarters in Washington.

The problem is not port security, it is the TWIC programme. It was and is a failure. It promises but gives nothing except false security, press releases and only attracts ridicule. One should not sleep better at night knowing John Pistole is on watch. ■

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