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Truth Verifier interrogates Russia travelers on 'lies'

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MOSCOW — Millions of passengers traveling through Russia soon will have to take a lie detector test as part of new airport security measures that could eventually be applied throughout the country.

The technology, to be introduced at Moscow's Domodedovo airport as early as July, is intended to identify terrorists

and drugs smugglers. But many passengers will be chilled by the set of four questions they will have to answer into a machine, including, "Have you ever lied to the authorities?"

"If a person fails to pass the test, he is accompanied by a special guard to a cubicle where he is asked questions in a more intense atmosphere," said Vladimir Kornilov, IT director

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for East Line, the company that operates the airport.

The fully automated instrument to be used, known as the "Truth Verifier," is certainly not the polygraph familiar from old spy thrillers.

Passengers will simply speak into a handset. Thanks to "layered-voice-analysis technology," the system, developed by an Israeli company, can even establish whether answers come from the memory or the imagination.

The technology already is being used by some insurance companies in Britain to screen telephone claims for fraud.

"We can understand that something like this could be uncomfortable for some passengers, but it is a necessary step," Mr. Kornilov said.

Initially, only passengers deemed suspicious by the FSB, the Russian security service, will take the test. But it will be expanded to cover selected international flights and eventually will encompass all passengers.

Passengers who fail will be subjected to more rigorous interrogation both by the verifier, whose accuracy increases to 98 percent with more extensive questioning, and by its human colleagues.

The machine asks four questions: The first is for full identity; the second, unnerving in its Soviet-style abruptness, demands: "Have you ever lied to the authorities?" It then asks whether either weapons or narcotics are being carried.

To cut delays to a minimum, passengers will take the tests after putting their shoes and baggage through the X-ray machines and before retrieving them. Officials say each test will take 30 seconds to a minute.