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Study: Suicide Bomb Detectors Impractical

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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WASHINGTON (AP) -- Setting up arrays of sensors in the hope of detecting suicide bombers in advance is unlikely to save many lives, according to a new study.

"Pedestrian suicide bombings might be better prevented by investing in intelligence leading to actions that prevent terrorists from prosecuting such attacks," Edward H. Kaplan and Moshe Kress report in Tuesday's issue of Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

The detectors currently available are expensive and not sufficiently reliable for widespread use, they said.

If the technology were affordable and reliable it might be useful in preventing attacks at such known targets as airports, the entrances to government buildings or sporting events, they said.

But the sensors would be expected to be of little help in suicide attacks at such random locations as restaurants and shops.

"Widespread deployment of suicide bomber detectors would at best save a few lives," Kaplan, a Yale professor, said in a statement.

Kaplan and Kress, a professor at the Naval Postgraduate School, studied the effectiveness of detectors by analyzing pedestrian suicide bombing attacks on random crowds in urban settings.

They found that detecting attackers required a dense field of equipment capable of sensing bombs. In addition, to prevent casualties the response, such as fleeing or falling to the ground, must occur quickly.

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In some cases, they said, response could even create even more casualties, as fleeing people spread out and increase the chance of being exposed to bomb fragments.

Their study was funded by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency.

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