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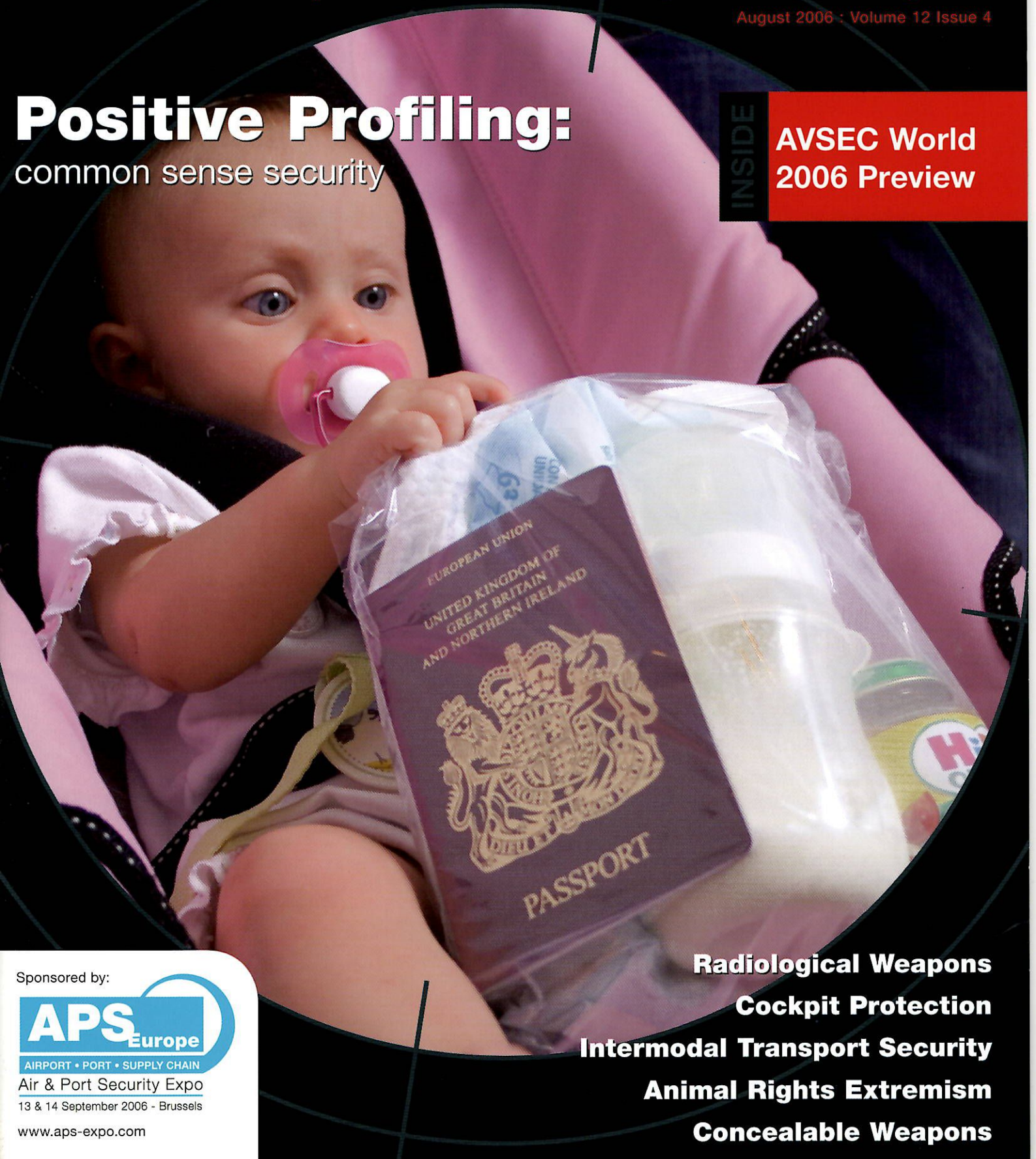
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## Positive Profiling: common sense security

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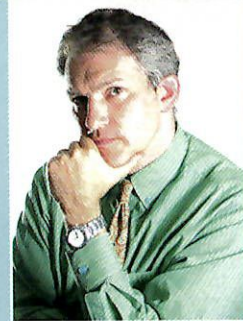
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# Positive Profiling: common sense security



By Philip Baum

**A**round the globe the X-ray machine and archway metal detector remain the workhorses of the aviation security checkpoint. Enhanced screening since 2001 has increased the number of items being screened by X-ray as shoes, jackets, laptops and camcorders separated from their bags and pocket contents are all being closely scrutinised. Despite this, the United Kingdom's response to the latest al-Qaeda style terror plot to destroy multiple airliners en route to the United States demonstrated an acceptance of the fallibilities of the existing system. Certain threats, including liquid explosive devices, are just not going to be detected using our current approach.

It's not as if we have not known about the threat posed by liquid explosives, and indeed explosives in other forms, for some time. The successful detonation of a device on a Philippine Airlines flight operating from Cebu to Tokyo in December 1994 using an "X-ray proof" bomb (liquid explosives concealed in a bottle of contact lens solution) was, presumably, best forgotten. Had the subsequent Oplan Bojinka to destroy 11 airliners operating trans-Pacific routes, scheduled for January 1995, also been successful, I doubt we would, in 2006, still be so reliant on the types of technology, albeit enhanced, deployed to counter the threats posed by the terrorists of the 1960's.

Has passenger screening improved since 2001? Well, it depends how you evaluate it. In terms of the detection of prohibited items being carried onto aircraft, there are some very impressive figures as to the numbers of items confiscated from passengers – penknives, knitting needles, scissors and cutlery in the main. However, equally many a passenger will attest to the fact that they have either intentionally or inadvertently carried a prohibited article through an airport checkpoint. In other words, it's a transparently flawed process.

We should not be looking for penknives, nor now should we be searching for tooth-

paste, shampoo, contact lens solution or deodorant. We should be looking at people, not at what they are carrying. Our screeners are far too engaged in hunting for the items they have been told to identify than focus on the potential risk each passenger poses. The search for liquids will now prove a further distraction.

The lengthy queues at airports are unnecessary, unacceptable and hamper security rather than enhance it; for the suicidal terrorist, we have created new targets in the process.

It is high time for some common sense to be injected into the screening process. You cannot screen all people for all types of threat items. There are some extremely impressive technologies already available yet not widely deployed – body scanners by X-ray or millimetre wave, explosive detection by trace, vapour or quadrupole resonance to name but a few. Yet, who are we going to screen using them? At this time they are simply too big, too expensive and too slow for screening everybody. Granted that fact and the limitations of existing technologies, for the foreseeable future we need to use intelligence as our first line of defence within airports.

### And, yes, I'm talking about profiling!

Profiling may well have identified the current alleged plot. The police and intelligence services are, after all, directing their attention and surveillance capabilities at those groups posing the greatest threat. It is even a practice that is commonplace at airports. Immigration authorities differentiate between people based on nationality. Customs organisations pull people aside based on their appearance and behaviour and, to a certain extent, ethnic origin. Every day people are found committing criminal offences after they have got off an aircraft. Why not before they board?

In the few days since the recent alleged plot was made public, there has been considerable debate in the United Kingdom as to the pros and cons of profiling. It is certainly

a contentious issue, the debate being fuelled by explosive headlines in the general media. Many civil liberty groups, alongside concerned representatives of Britain's Asian and Muslim communities are being extremely vocal in their opposition to profiling. Meanwhile there are a disturbing number of voices crying out for the victimisation of young Asian males, if not every person who is from an ethnic minority group.

Whilst I am pro profiling, I am certainly anti racial profiling. First of all we are not only looking for terrorists at our checkpoints, we are looking for all people who may criminally interfere with aviation – disruptive passengers and the mentally disturbed included. Secondly, there is no stereotypical terrorist. I have taught profiling for the last 16 years and have always tried to dispel the myth of terrorists being 25 to 35 year old, sweaty males, wearing dark glasses and three days growth of beard...and, obviously, Middle Eastern. The two prime examples of profiling working in the identification of airline passengers in possession of explosive devices are Anne-Marie Murphy and Richard Reid – neither were of Middle Eastern appearance.

Beyond the aviation industry there are plenty of examples of non-Asian/Muslim people who have carried out atrocities – people that our security system should identify. Timothy McVeigh is the obvious example. So too, Martin Bryant, responsible for the Port Arthur massacre, Thomas Hamilton in Dunblane, and Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber.

At one end of the profiling spectrum, we have the Israeli technique whereby passengers are individually questioned and a risk analysis of each passenger is then effected, with many passengers being cross-questioned by a second security agent. At the other end of the spectrum, we have covert surveillance, sometimes termed passive profiling, that aims to identify suspicious behaviour, through the use of covert airport patrols and CCTV surveillance. The former is not a practical solution outside of Israel given

the sheer numbers of people travelling and the size of airport terminal buildings; even the Israelis themselves have started to place a greater reliance on technology. The latter, already exists in many airports around the world, UK ones included.

There is a third way. Active Positive Profiling. By active, I mean that an actual decision is made about each and every passenger that will determine what screening technology they, and their carry-on baggage will be examined by. And by positive I mean that we are not trying to identify suspicious behaviour or target any one group, but rather decide which passengers pose the lowest threat. That does not equate with automatically deciding that a family group, by definition, poses no threat, but it does mean deciding that if a family group looks like a family, acts like a family and, most importantly, interacts with the outside world like a family, then we should fast-track them through the screening system. So too with business travellers or any other type of passenger about whom we are confident has a valid reason for travel. Observe an airport security checkpoint for a few minutes and one can see countless examples of unnecessary screening in progress. There is no need to get these passengers to extract laptops or camcorders from hand baggage or remove their shoes or belts. Such processes simply divert our attention from the real threat and ensure that the queues are so long that air travel starts to lose its appeal and purpose – speedy transportation from point A to point B. Terrorism wins.

Positive profiling will identify a significant percentage of passengers, depending on location, which will leave us with “the rest”. These will be made up of those about whom we do have cause for concern, because of their appearance and behaviour, and those about whom we have no cause for concern but about whom we cannot clearly state pose no threat – primarily as their reason for travel is unclear. There will also be those who look innocent but are perceived to have the potential to be used by terrorists as unwitting accomplices. The level of subsequent screening all these passengers will be subjected to will depend on the perceived threat. Some may be subjected to physical search, whilst others may be examined by questioning, inspection by some form of explosion detection technology, use of a body scanner or a combination of techniques.

Such a system becomes unpredictable, surely the essence of good security. It also focuses our limited resources on those who are more likely to pose a threat whilst not exempting anybody from traditional screen-

## “dispel the myth of terrorists being 25 to 35 year old, sweaty males; wearing dark glasses and three days growth of beard...and, obviously, Middle Eastern”

ing techniques. There would always be a random percentage subjected to a level of security beyond that that their profile dictates they receive.

Of course, its success will depend upon trained, streetwise individuals. Its implementation, however, will require a total change in mindset by the authorities. We can pretend that the existing system works, but it clearly doesn't. If the British authorities, who are rightly regarded as having one of the most effective airport security regimes in the world, have recognised that there are huge loopholes, perhaps it is time for the global aviation community to be considerably more

proactive, less politically correct and start applying some logic to the passenger screening process. After all, it's a global problem, not a British one.

Editorial Comment: Please note that this issue was just going to press when the alleged terrorist plot was revealed. We managed to replace the Lead Editorial, yet other articles in this issue were sent to graphics before the news broke. Our October issue will feature articles directly addressing the issues recent events have raised.

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