

# AVIATION **security** *international*

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# Terrors' New Arena

by Philip Baum

**On Friday 7th August I sat and watched the tragic scenes of the aftermath of the Nairobi and Dar es Salaam bombings. CNN's unsanitised coverage depicted the reality of a terrorist outrage. Who was responsible? Why Africa? Why now? And, perhaps above all else, what for?**

As teams rushed to the scenes to assist in the search for survivors one was confronted by the two extremes of humanity: those who wished to kill and those who wished to preserve life. Sure there were political points to win and lose; perhaps the Israelis utilised the tragedy as an opportunity to repay their debt to the Kenyan government for allowing their aircraft to refuel in Nairobi during the 1976 Entebbe rescue mission. But, for the individual members of such teams, the utter disrespect for the lives on the innocent must have been almost impossible to come to terms with whatever the objective.

Memories of the Abu Nidal orchestrated massacres at Rome and Vienna airports in 1986 sprung to mind. Once again, a group had managed, within minutes, to wreak havoc in two cities in two different countries resulting in loss of life and injury to innocent victims. The perpetrators were no amateurs.

One previously unknown group, The Islamic Army for the Liberation of Holy Places, rushed to claim the 'prestige' of being the assassins. The Nairobi bomb, that to date has resulted in a death toll of 247 and in excess of 5000 injuries,

was code-named Operation al-Qaaba. And, the Dar es Salaam bomb, that killed 10 and injured 70, was named Operation al-Aqsa. The al-Qaaba is one of the holiest mosques in Mecca and the al-Aqsa is one of Jerusalem's mosques. There has been little evidence to support their claim and such boasts are pretty much de rigueur after each terrorist outrage with the real culprits remaining out of the public eye, knowing that they have achieved their goal. They have humiliated their target. They have put fear into those diplomats, business travelers and tourists venturing abroad. They have demonstrated that even Superpowers are open to attack. They have disrupted the ways in which individuals and states operate. Indicative of this was the fact that within a week of the African bombings the United States had closed its embassy in Tirana, Albania. Fears grew that there could be further terrorist actions in that state following reports that the CIA had been involved in the arrest of Islamic militants in Albania in July.

The Americans consider that Osama bin Ladin could well be behind the attack. A resident of Afghanistan, bin Ladin is a Saudi millionaire banished from his own country and branded as "the most dangerous non-state terrorist in the world" by Sandy Berger, the US National Security Adviser. He is thought to have been responsible for the bomb that killed 19 Americans in Saudi Arabia in 1996 and may well have timed the African attacks to coincide with the 8th anniversary of US troops arrival in Saudi Arabia in readiness for the Gulf War.

To many the choice of Africa as the target was the most puzzling aspect of the atrocity. Then again, perhaps it was to be expected. If the target was America, which it surely was, then it was a simple matter of locating its Achilles Heel. Security controls in African states are known to be no match for the sophisticated international terrorist and there has been, in the past, a general belief that such incidents would be perpetrated in Europe.

Yet there have been warning signs. Even a Pentagon report, entitled "Terror 2000", that was drawn up a few years back, predicted that trends in terrorism would mutate in the post-Cold War period around the world, with the terrorists moving further and faster to devise imaginative new targets and tactics that government counter-terrorism officials would find it hard to keep up with. The same report predicted that international terrorism would reach the American mainland and that homegrown zealots would also pose a major security threat; such predictions were borne out at both the World Trade Centre and in Oklahoma. The use of chemical and bio-

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logical agents was also considered as a method of attacking a subway system - the Sarin gas attacks in Tokyo in 1995 had not yet taken place.

The aviation security industry must take serious note of such developments. At conferences, in press releases and in industry talk we all hear about the wonderful new technologies available. Yet where are such defences situated? In

# editorial

those countries and in those airports that can afford them. All credit to the Heathrows, Orlys, JFKs and Ben Gurions of this world for their investment in our security, but we mustn't try to kid ourselves that the globe is secure from terrorist attacks against aviation.

We often speak about security in low-risk locations. I appreciate that there are prime targets and that it is necessary to carry out a risk analysis in any given location. Yet, the truth is that when we classify a place as being low risk it can actually be detrimental to security and we are actually increasing the likelihood of it being exploited by terrorist groups. We have a responsibility to ensure that our airports and airlines, world-wide, are on guard. It's easy for the managers and supervisors to make comments and, probably, the

majority of readers of this journal are well-informed individuals but, in truth, it is those front-line personnel charged with security functions that must be made aware. We should take the African tragedy and use it in briefings to demonstrate that international terrorism recognises no borders and that low risk should not be equated with a lackadaisical approach to security.

Furthermore we must stress that peace agreements can, rather than guarantee our safety, enhance the terrorist

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threat as the extremists, on either side, express their objections by inhumane acts. Ask the people of Omagh whether the Good Friday Agreement brought an end to "The Troubles" in Northern Ireland; a mere week after the African bombings, on 15th August, at least 26 people were killed and over 200 injured when the "Real IRA" bombed a high street filled with shoppers and summer carnival visitors. And whilst Rabin and Arafat might have shaken hands on the White House lawn, Israelis and Palestinians continue to lose their lives.

We have to accept that there will always be extremists that will use whatever means they can to change the order of the world. We in turn must stand prepared to combat any type of attack, in any airport or on any airline, anywhere around this globe •

## CHRISTMAS PUDDING OR SEMTEX?

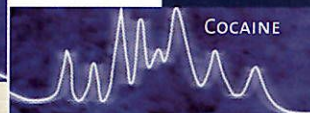
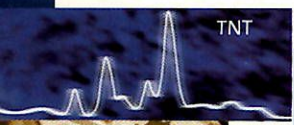
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