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Screening:**
assessing the
feasibility

Leasing Jurisdiction
The Quest for Traces and Vapours
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Innovation & Courage Required:

leaders and trailblazers sought

by Philip Baum



At this year's IATA/ACI AVSEC World, industry movers and shakers gathered for their annual shindig. A chance for old friends to catch up, discuss, berate, applaud, bemoan, debate, postulate, question, benchmark, sell, buy and learn. Whether inside the conference hall, huddled away in private meetings, on an exhibition stand or quaffing a drink in Vancouver's aquarium, many of the deliberations taking place, privately or publicly, had an unnervingly similar undertone – change is urgently needed.

Speaker after speaker emphasised the reality that our current screening processes are in need of an overhaul. No longer should we be screening all passengers for all prohibited items and no longer should we be bolting on additional security measures to an antiquated system. There has to be a better way.

The regulators are in an awkward position. Should they be proactive and introduce measures to counter plots yet to be discovered, they will be vilified for responding to unproven threats and, thereby, over-regulating. If they remain reactive, they will have to withstand potential ridicule for always being one step behind the terrorist.

Whilst our industry needs regulating, there is a desperate need for a more innovative approach to practical security measures on the ground. There have been many conferences and seminars that have considered what the airport of the future will look like and how emerging security

technologies will be integrated therein, but most of the countries hosting such gatherings find themselves bogged down in a quagmire of regulations that are, if anything, backward in nature rather than progressive. So, from where will the desired leadership emerge?

One naturally turns to the United States. Whilst the country has invested huge sums in research and development and manufacturers seek US approval and certification of emerging technologies, America can hardly boast a state-of-the-art aviation security system. Checkpoint observation, supported by data from pitiful test results, reveal a disturbing picture as to the quality of screening effectiveness.

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Indeed, whilst the rest of the world fears the arrival of (U.S.) Transportation Security Administration inspectors on foreign shores on missions to certify and sanctify their airports, the inspectors would do well to remember that people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.

Israel is often lauded as being the home of aviation security best practice, but it is nigh on impossible to replicate their approach elsewhere granted the size of the aviation industry. And, one could also argue that any attempt to do so would be overkill and grant our foes a further tacit victory.

Europe appears convinced that the emphasis must remain on passenger screening and regulating accordingly, with the United Kingdom, once an internationally respected leader in the field, demonstrating that even pan-European harmonisation of security procedures remains an illusive goal. Much of the criticism is unwarranted and unjustified and actually exemplifies the risks of going it alone, but we must all hold our hands up and admit that we have built a system that will be proven to fail by the millions of travellers, who deem themselves to be aviation security experts, that are calling in to radio chat-shows with their latest stories.

Sadly, due to political and economic pressures, much of the rest of the world has simply followed suit. Popping up, around the globe are aviation security systems that could be sold by Thai market traders as being “Same, same. But different!” Variations on a theme, showing little ingenuity, each aiming to

satisfy the regulators rather than enhance security and facilitate passenger and cargo transportation.

On 14th November, the British government announced a series of measures to enhance security at sites of strategic importance and other crowded places. Cue an opportunity, in a slightly less regulated area, to be really creative and become a world leader again. The initial emphasis is to focus on the 250 busiest railway stations, together with "airport terminals, ports and over one hundred sensitive installations". Frighteningly, however, at "some large railway stations, whilst doing everything to avoid inconvenience", the government says, "we are planning additional screening of baggage and passenger searches". Cue queues rather than creativity.

However, there are signs of hope, as the same government is sending out "up to 160 counter-terrorism advisers" who are to "train civilian staff to identify suspect activity" as well as providing guidance to "thousands of cinemas, theatres, restaurants, hotels, sporting venues and commercial centres, and all hospitals, schools and places of worship" on how to be more vigilant. (But of course, they don't believe profiling works to protect aviation!)

Many feel that we are overly protective of our aviation system and that, whilst it is an iconic target, the nature of 21st Century terrorism means that all public venues are equally exposed. Airport-style security, in its current format, cannot be effectively deployed at sports stadiums and the like. Rather than try to do so, perhaps the reverse should be the case. We are being afforded a wonderful opportunity to deploy emerging technologies that can scan people "on the move", technologies that might actually be the backbone of the aviation security system in the future. Let's do so before the other transportation modes and entertainment industries become too regulated.

Screening by millimetre wave, laser, QR or terahertz technologies? What about layered voice or gait analysis? All talked about for years in the aviation industry, but rarely deployed. Would the deployment of questionable technologies leave us exposed? Quite possibly. Does not the metal detector and X-ray machine leave us exposed at the airport too? In both settings, the deterrence factor would remain high, but we'd be moving in the right direction and the passengers would be moving too.

The only way that we will see real development within the aviation security system is to witness the results in another arena. Let's not lose the chance to use sports stadiums, railway terminals and even town centres as our test-bed.

It could be that leadership will emerge from within the aviation community. Some of the Middle Eastern and Far Eastern airports recently constructed have been designed with futuristic security in mind. The growth of the Asian aviation market, coupled with the population size of the likes of China and India could also lead to a total re-think of the security processes. The economic power of the region too may force the rest of the world to follow suit.

Regardless as to source, we are in desperate need of some bold, courageous leaders who are prepared to buck the trend. True innovators. Were one to be writing an advertisement for such a post under "Job Vacancies", we'd be adding the phrase, "bureaucrats need not apply". The reality is, however, that it is only the bureaucrats who can effect wholesale change. My guess is, there would be no applicants were the industry to seek out such an individual, State or organisation to lead the way...and that we'll still be gathering at AVSEC World in Seoul next November saying "Same, same. No difference". After all, we don't seem to like trailblazers. But I'd be happy to be proved wrong.



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