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# Raising The Standards

by Philip Baum

The challenges facing the aviation security industry are many. The general public may believe that quick-fix solutions exist, yet the reality is that concepts such as 100% hold baggage screening and positive passenger/bag reconciliation are little more than cogs in a far larger security web.

Even those of us within the industry must sometimes ponder as to whether the vast sums spent on securing aviation are actually warranted. It is so easy to look at better ways of spending public funds. Yet one only has to listen to those who have lost loved ones in previous tragedies to realise that it would be criminal to lower our guard. Indeed it is incumbent upon us all to raise standards.

Probably the biggest problem facing the aviation security industry is the competitive market place in which it operates. I am constantly amazed by the latest offers of low cost airlines. Presumably they operate to make a profit. In order to do so they must drive hard bargains in all their purchases. Even the mainstream scheduled carriers have long been forced to economise where possible. In respect of security, carriers usually opt to meet minimum standards stipulated, where staff receive minimal training and procedures employed are usually regarded as more of an insurance policy than as a genuine attempt to prevent a hijacking or aircraft bombing.

“international aviation security legislation is woefully minimalist”

Airports too are keen to attract new business and many feel quite relaxed about simply achieving the standards of ICAO Annex 17, basic though they are. Furthermore, many states take a somewhat laissez-faire attitude towards the interpretation of even these standards. Consider the requirement for a National

Aviation Security Programme. Even ICAO, although they do proffer a model programme, does not stipulate what such a programme must contain. Accepted, most states do not take liberties on this point, however the fact remains that airports, where they have responsibility for screening, may be loathe to offer more than the basics as it will ultimately effect the landing fees charged to airlines and could drive business to a competitor airport.

Some measures require will rather than finance. Legislation designed to respond to the threat posed by the disruptive passenger, the resurrection of that worthy ideal of a closed cockpit door policy, or more detailed specification as to the testing of security personnel are examples of this.

Other measures require both finance and will. Consider the separation of arriving and departing passengers, the screening of cargo, or the implementation of passenger screening technologies that will allow for the detection of explosives as well as metal. Consider too paying security screeners a wage that better reflects the onerous responsibility placed upon them.

In the last few months we have witnessed a return to more traditional methods of targeting our industry, including terrorist and asylum seeker hijacks and, more recently, even D.B. Cooper-style parajacking. Few disagree that monies spent on security are monies well spent. Yet how can we ensure that the money is spent and that Camp Zeist-style trials will never again grace our screens? The question is all the more pertinent in this cheap-flight era we live in. Where does the security budget come from? Neither the airlines nor the airports are likely to increase standards voluntarily, save for a few worthy exceptions. International legislation, that may inflate ticket prices across the board, is the only way forward. Fortunately, Annex 17 is under review.

And, whilst the way in which the Hatch Amendment has been single-nationally presented may be abhorrent to some, due to undertones of it being economically driven, the security concept behind it is sound.

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To drive up security standards we have to increase the demands placed upon the carriers and airports. This cannot be done unilaterally as there has to be a level playing field. Despite the general acknowledgement that aviation is a global business and terrorism a universal problem, international aviation security legislation is woefully minimalist. Precious few states lead by example yet, and although you could rightly brand me biased, there are some countries, the United Kingdom included, that can be proud of their more proactive approach to aviation security issues.

The threat will always be diverse. Whether the destruction of Pan Am 103 was a Libyan plot, an Iranian-sponsored retaliatory attack (as is now, once again, being mooted) or perpetrated by some other individual or group may be of interest but has little security value. Our legislation, procedures, equipment and staff have to be prepared to meet that threat on any airline, at any airport, year-round. I appreciate that standards stipulated in ICAO Annex 17 can only go so far and may never be a blueprint for an ideal aviation security programme. The Annex 17 “revisionists”, however, and ultimately the contracting states, should take the opportunity to promulgate new standards that will better safeguard the flying public regardless as to state of embarkation or nationality of air carrier.

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