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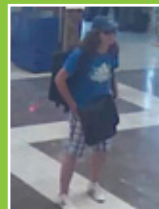
## Securing China's Skies: in the aftermath of the Xinjiang hijacking

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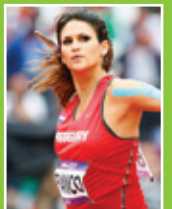
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# TERROR IN BULGARIA, HIJACKING IN XINJIANG: concern in Reykjavik, but joy in London

by Philip Baum

I have always held the view that security measures taken for domestic routes ought to match those taken on international routes. History demonstrates that more domestic routes have been targeted by hijackers than international ones. Likewise, I am concerned when I see greater resources allocated to routes deemed to be high risk than those that might be regarded as less attractive targets. Both standpoints demonstrate a fairly blinkered vision of the objectives of an aviation security system.

In the last few years numerous flights have fallen victim to acts of unlawful interference on routes where many readers would have to reach for an atlas to locate either the airport of departure or of arrival. Try, for example, Narvik to Bodø, Blenheim to Christchurch, Melbourne to Launceston or Moscow to Volgograd? Or, perhaps, Tirana to Istanbul, Hotan to Urumqi or Colón to Panama City? In more than half of these instances, the hijackers were suicidal.

This does not mean that we should equip remote airfields with the most technologically advanced equipment; that makes neither economic nor security sense. What it does mean, however, is that whatever security standards are in place need to be enforced with as much vigour as those at major air transport hubs. Training and subsequent drills should be equally taxing and basic requirements, such as access controls, staff vetting and passenger screening, ought to be applied with a belief that somebody might be trying to penetrate the system for nefarious purposes.

It is reassuring to see that, in the last month, the Icelandic authorities took a very dim view of the fact that two asylum seekers, from Algeria and Morocco, had managed to scale a fence and board an Icelandair aircraft at Keflavik International Airport. Fortunately they were found during a security search of the aircraft. Likewise, in Manchester, a full scale enquiry was launched to determine how an 11-year-old boy could manage to board a flight to Rome without possessing any travel documents or be accompanied by anybody else.

Naturally huge attention is paid to securing high profile events, such as the Olympics. As a Londoner, I had the privilege of attending a number of events and I was pleasantly surprised by not only the quality of the visible security measures in place but by the professional, yet friendly, manner in which the services were delivered. Despite pre-Games negative publicity concerning security, the queue management, screening protocols and alarm resolution processes seemed exemplary. Visitors and athletes arriving from overseas spoke highly of airport security as well (so the views expressed regarding Heathrow on the first and last pages of this issue of ASI may differ) and created a wonderful atmosphere for a successful Olympiad. (Excuse me for pointing out that, for us Brits, the feel good factor was enhanced by Great Britain coming third in the medals table, ahead of Russia, with 29 gold medals; I first wrote for ASI in 1996, at the time of the Atlanta Olympics in which Team GB managed one solitary gold!)

Huge sums of money were poured into securing London 2012. It's hard to say whether or not it was a good investment given that we don't know whether an attack might have been more likely with less spent on the preventative side. Yet, in the month leading up to the Games, two significant attacks did take place against the aviation

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industry. They were not in Britain and not linked to the Olympics, but do go to demonstrate that security is only as good as its weakest link. In both cases, the perpetrators were caught on CCTV footage but, as is often the case, it only became apparent after the attacks had taken place, reinforcing the view that CCTV is currently only being used as an evidential tool.

On 18 July, a terrorist attack took place at Sarafovo Airport in Burgas, Bulgaria. Five Israeli tourists, a Bulgarian bus driver and the 'bomber' were killed and over 30 injured. The event showed how landside areas of airports can be the terrorists' arenas and that they need not undergo security screening in order to carry out their attacks airside. The jury is still out as to whether the bomber was suicidal or not. Some believe that he had been duped into carrying a bag laden with explosives which he thought he was supposed to place on the bus carrying the Israelis to their hotels. When he was next to the bus, the device may have been remotely detonated. Regardless, what we do know is that the bomber looked like a western tourist and had spent some considerable time waiting in the airports arrivals hall, bomb on back, for the flight from Tel Aviv to land.

In Xinjiang, on 29 June, six men had boarded a Tianjin Airlines flight at Hotan Airport and, ten minutes after its take-off for Urumqi, tried to hijack the aircraft using weapons and, according to some reports, explosives that they had brought on board in aluminium crutches. Some of the men had pretended to be disabled as they went through screening and CCTV footage clearly shows the crutches being placed on top of the X-ray machine whilst one of the passengers was searched. Fortunately, due to the heroic actions of the crew and passengers, the hijackers were overpowered.

The recent attacks against aviation highlight the need for us to ensure the highest of security standards wherever we are on the globe, regardless as to whether or not there is a high profile event - or route - occupying media attention. The families of the Israelis and Bulgarian who died will no doubt be satisfied that London 2012 has, to date, gone smoothly but will still question whether more could have been done to prevent their loss? ■

