

THE GLOBAL JOURNAL OF AIRPORT & AIRLINE SECURITY



Bolivians: the latest hijacker stereotype?

- The TATP Detection Challenge
- Passenger Profiling
- Corporate Jet Security
- Screening Musical Instruments
- Bizarre Passenger Behaviour

Principal media sponsor to:

AVSEC World
2009

Bolivians: the latest hijacker stereotype?

by Philip Baum



It is often incorrectly said that, “Not all Muslims are terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims”. As a result, there are daily complaints about passengers of Middle Eastern origin or bearing Arabic-sounding names being targeted for enhanced screening at airports. There is little doubt, even within the Muslim world, that the greatest threat to civil aviation emanates from Islamic fundamentalists; if one excludes the supposedly now defunct Tamil Tigers, 99% of all suicidal attacks carried out over the past decade have been carried out by followers of Islam. So, granted the devastating loss of life that could result from the actions of their ilk, is it not reasonable that their brethren suffer the relatively minor discomforts dished out at the airport security checkpoint? Surely the scale of the now confirmed (as opposed to ‘alleged’) liquid explosive plot to destroy multiple airliners on trans-Atlantic passages in 2006 justifies extreme measures?

Governments were, and continue to be, faced with a choice between two evils; either to embrace a racially-orientated profiling system that singles out potential perpetrators on the grounds of religion or nationality, or to subject the entire travelling public to limitations of the quantity of liquids, aerosols and gels that they carry. Opponents of the first option would cry out ‘discrimination’ and have the student population (of all races, religions, and colours) and civil liberty groups march in protest at the victimisation of an entire community because of the crimes of a few; opponents of the latter option would, and do, claim ‘communal punishment’ and the triumph of a system based on overly-liberal democratic values, rather than common sense and evidence-based security requirements.

There is a third approach, rarely deployed, which is based on proportionality. Those who study war ethics – and one of the battlefields of modern-day warfare is our industry - often debate what a ‘proportional response’ is. Last winter’s conflict in Gaza resulted in Israel being accused of a military response that was disproportional to the attacks perpetrated against it; one could have the same debate over the Allies bombing of Dresden at the end

of World War II, or for that matter, America’s use of nuclear weapons against Japan. Defendants of such seemingly heavy-handed military responses argue that, not to have taken such actions could have resulted in a greater loss of life in the long-term than the bombardments themselves caused in the short-term. Whether or not you believe this to be the case, it does raise the question as to whether our avsec response needs to be proportional to the attacks perpetrated or proportional to the potential result of our not taking action.

The limitations on liquids are not justified. We are being communally punished, an action that would be acceptable if it enhanced security. But it does not. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Excessive focus on any one item simply diverts our attention from the vast range of threats that actually exist and encourages the groups who would have used such modus operandi to explore other, harder to detect, substances or concealments. Likewise excessive focus on any one group of passengers is unjustifiable, not because it is racist but because it does not make security sense and diverts our attention from the possibility of other ethnic or religious groups perpetrating attacks; the lesson of the Lod Airport attack of 1972, when the Japanese Red Army acted on behalf of the Palestinian cause, and Baader Meinhof’s active participation in the Air France hijacking to Entebbe, seem to have been forgotten.

A proportional response is designed to reflect what could happen, not what did happen. Consider this scenario: you are the Captain of an airliner who is told that a male passenger is sweating profusely and behaving unusually. You are still at the gate, but are told that the passenger went through screening and nothing was found. Do you depart with the man onboard? Alternatively, you are the same Captain who, now airborne, is told that, on page 47 of the in-flight magazine, the words “there is a bomb on this plane” are found. Do you divert? It’s a question I pose frequently. Normally the answer to the bomb threat

dilemma is to divert...just to be safe....despite the fact that nobody would convey a genuine bomb threat using a methodology that is more than likely not to be seen! However, the suspicious passenger dilemma prompts a response that all avenues must be exhausted before contemplating his being off-loaded. After all, the argument goes, they have been screened! The ‘just to be safe’ option seems to have been eliminated over fears of the airline being sued. Bottom line...responding to a ridiculous bomb threat is disproportionate and failing to take action about a passenger causing concern is equally disproportionate.

“...a Cessna operated by Aero Montañas was the target of a hijack attempt by two Peruvians and a Bolivian...”

Embracing a proportionate approach would force security agencies, and those that regulate them, to explore threat vectors well beyond the passenger screening checkpoint. Vulnerabilities could be addressed with an equivalent resolve to that displayed in identifying liquids at checkpoints; vulnerabilities in cargo screening procedures, currently papered over by a mixture of bureaucracy and semantic debates over terminology; vulnerabilities in airport employee background checks, woefully inadequate as demonstrated by the all-too-frequent reporting of criminal gangs operating airside or even in security roles; vulnerabilities in checkpoint screening relating to the identification of chemical or biological weapons, the detection of which is impossible currently granted our reliance on the technologies deployed; vulnerabilities in general aviation, despite frequent incidents, an area ignored by regulators; and vulnerabilities relating to off-airport activities, evidenced by the horrific rise in incidents of laser cockpit illumination, let

alone the MANPADS issue which has been put on the back-burner since the liquid explosive plot was identified.

So, we have a choice. It's not whether to pick on groups of travellers because they match our stereotype threat or to confiscate liquids from genuine passengers; it is whether to apply rules of proportionality and move towards a comprehensive aviation security solution that is futuristic or to be disproportionate and rely on a system based almost exclusively on deterrence rather than effectiveness.

The news headlines do little to help our cause. In August, the Lockerbie case returned to the front page with the release of Abdelbaset Ali al-Megrahi from his Scottish prison cell on, supposedly, compassionate grounds due to his suffering from terminal prostate cancer so that he could die at home in Libya. (Like many in the industry, I was sickened by the hero's welcome he was given by the Qaddafi regime and horrified that a man, sentenced to life imprisonment for a crime totally devoid of compassion, should be afforded such concern. Then again, it wasn't compassion; it was the sound of the cash register that prompted his release!) And, as soon as the Lockerbie story was laid to rest, we witnessed the verdict in

the liquid explosive plot and the subsequent sentencing of Abdulla Ahmed Ali, Assad Sarwar, Tanvir Hussain, and Umar Islam. With names like these, alongside al-Megrahi, we face an uphill struggle in getting the world to recognise that the Islamic community should not be the sole target of our scrutiny. But it shouldn't...

"...a Bolivian national hijacked an Aeromexico flight soon after its departure from Cancun..."

On a daily basis incidents occur that never make it to the newspapers or cable news networks or, if they do, they command only momentary coverage. They are the small, yet significant, acts that can be prevented by the aviation security front-line, provided it is not distracted by forced focus on the big threats that, when it comes to it, only the intelligence community will prevent from becoming a reality.

This September two flights were hijacked. On 5th September, in Peru, a Cessna

operated by Aero Montañas was the target of a hijack attempt by two Peruvians and a Bolivian, Mario Sobenes Ali, who had entered the country using a dead man's travel documents. The aircraft had been chartered by the men with a view to them stealing the aircraft, quite possibly with the intention of later using it for the facilitation of the transportation and trade of narcotics. And, on 9th September, another Bolivian national hijacked an Aeromexico flight soon after its departure from the Mexican resort city of Cancun bound for Mexico City. The hijacker, Josmar Flores Pereira was a former drug addict and alcoholic who had found religion. Indeed, he had a message for the President of Mexico and wished to convey to him the fact that with the date being 09/09/09 (666 upside down!) the country was going to be hit by an earthquake. Mario Sobenes Ali and Josmar Flores Pereira are representative of the types of criminals and psychologically disturbed individuals who provide a constant challenge to our industry.

In fact, maybe that's why Evo Morales, the President of Bolivia, has made it to the US "No-Fly" List. It's not the Muslims we should be targeting...it's the Bolivians!

E.J. BROOKS
Security Products Group

Tamper-Evident Solutions for Total Aviation Security

KNR



For Aircraft doors and hatches - no residue.

KC



Covert security label inspected with ultraviolet light*.

MRN



Colour matched to cabin interior to maintain appearance.

SECURSTOW™
Sealable Life Vest Stowage (LVS)



For economy seats
*The Markitwise LVS product meets the TSA criteria for acceptable sealed life vest holder" - US Transportation Security Administration (US TSA).

Secur Pull



High Security Seal suitable for duty free trolleys.

Security Tapes



For secure transportation of high value goods and merchandise.

Spring Lok



Easily applied and removed; suitable for catering trolleys and similar applications.

Baggage Security



Security labels for crew and passenger baggage.

*Ultraviolet lights for verifying security labels, travel documents and currency are available.

E.J. BROOKS
Security Products Group
Homme Castle, Shelsley Walsh, Worcestershire, WR6 6RR
Tel: 01886 812 427 Fax: 01886 812 243
www.ejbrooksuk.com

