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# EFFECTIVE TARGETS: focus on security, not facilitation

by Philip Baum

For the past couple of days I have sat and listened to a range of speakers address a conference on topics which loosely fall under the heading of 'aviation security'. Most of the papers presented were extremely informative and promoted industry best practice, yet I was left with the niggling feeling that something was missing...

I was exceptionally impressed by the reduction in passenger wait times quoted, the increased speed at which scanning devices could process bags, the programmes embarked upon which have raised levels of staff motivation, the research effected to evaluate the hurdles to be overcome in order to meet LAGs screening deadlines, and the quality of the data harnessed by airports and airlines on checkpoint performance. But still, why did I feel less than content with what I was hearing?

It would seem, granted the technological enhancements, the increased focus on human factors and overall greater industry cooperation, that we are taking great strides forward. But, perhaps, therein lies the problem...the definition of the word 'forward'. We can only be making progress if we know which way we are going and what the final destination is. And, in the case of aviation security, surely that should be developing a system which reduces the number of criminal acts being perpetrated against civil aviation?

For more than a decade we have seen the industry attempt to merge the world of 'facilitation' with that of 'security'. It's all about processing passengers and making sure that we get them through the system as quickly as possible whilst meeting the mandated security requirements. As a result, we measure security checkpoints in terms of bags and/or passengers per hour, wait times, TIP scores, and percentage of random inspections performed. It's all great data, but data that has no bearing on whether we are actually improving security. I'm all for improving many of these throughput rates. After all, I fly frequently and don't want to be held up unnecessarily. But what I would really like to see is the checkpoint measured by numbers of interdictions. And, let me be clear, when I say interdictions, I am not referring to the identification of a passenger carrying a 125ml bottle of perfume in their carry-on baggage...a 'find' that is more likely to have distracted a screener from finding a genuine threat.

Fortunately we don't have that many terrorists wandering through our checkpoints, so real hit rates are hard to use as a performance indicator. Criminal activity is, however, commonplace and it would be refreshing to see checkpoint data on, for example, the number of times an individual is reported to the police or the frequency with which airline personnel are told that a passenger might not be fit to fly. If a major international airport is not able to present such data, then either it demonstrates an inability of the screeners to identify any wrongdoers or they are identifying such persons, but are failing to seize the opportunity to demonstrate their effectiveness at interdicting real threats.

Embarkation airports, and the regulators thereof, would do well to look at Customs and Immigration figures at the point of disembarkation to identify how many people are managing to

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both board aircraft and still be detected (obviously we have no data on who sails through the entire system unnoticed). Such data ought then to be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the screening process to identify criminal acts and might even serve to motivate the screeners to perform better.

Threat Image Projection (TIP), at best, serves to improve the probability of screeners being able to detect prohibited items... but I still hear screeners express the view that, despite the growing size of image libraries, they still recognise TIP images as being TIP images and, to a certain extent, go out in search of TIP images rather than thinking outside the box (or case!). Furthermore, image libraries do tend to focus on the threats of yesterday rather than those of tomorrow and, obviously, only those which can be identified using X-ray technology. The use of TIP is valuable, especially in ensuring that screeners do at least examine each image...but the scores achieved do not demonstrate the success or failure of the screening checkpoint.

Over the last few months, we have borne witness to the continuously evolving nature of the Jihadist threat. Sickening online images of innocent people being beheaded, and the cold, calculated use of social media to spread fear and hatred, exemplify the depths of depravity to which certain individuals can stoop. But these messages also show innovation, sophistication, and an understanding of what the security services can and cannot do to protect us. When Drummer Lee Rigby was assassinated in the streets of London, many regarded the act as the one-off action of lunatics armed with weapons from the Middle Ages. Yet the recent plot uncovered in Australia to commit similar acts far from the perceived hostile zones of Syria and Iraq, along with the front-of-house attacks perpetrated by non-Jihadists at airports in the past year - from Los Angeles to Curaçao and Peshawar to La Paz - are a warning that we too must be innovative and avoid over-engineering our defences.

Perhaps we were too hasty to view 'facilitation' and 'security' as arts which could fall under the same portfolio? Yes, we want to get passengers through the system efficiently, but, more importantly, we want to ensure security. To do that, we need to start measuring our effectiveness in terms of security rather than in terms of facilitation. ■

