INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY SUGGESTIONS FOR THE JCPAA REVIEW OF AVIATION SECURITY

I appreciate the opportunity to appear at the public hearing of the Committee. I have a number of suggestions to make for your consideration. These are a follow-on to my 21 August 2003 presentation to the JCPAA on the threat to aviation security from politically-motivated violent groups and individuals.

My suggestions relate to the areas of intelligence, aircraft, flying staff, airports, and legislation - as follows:

Intelligence

Firstly, intelligence. May I suggest that the JCPAA consider recommending the establishment of a Commonwealth aviation intelligence group in Australia, similar to that which exists under the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) in the United States, to be responsible for such issues as:

- Advising Australian civil aviation, on an ongoing basis, of the nature of the security threat within Australia and externally.
- Undertaking assessments of the security situation at overseas airports used by Australian carriers.
- Providing input to contingency planning for Australian air evacuation within Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific. We need to be better placed to manage potential air evacuations by both military and civilian aircraft. We were fortunate last year that Bali was so close to Australia, with good airport facilities.
- Advice to the SAS on civil aviation issues. SAS has a role in accessing civilian aircraft in certain circumstances and needs to be kept up to date, for example, with aircraft internal design changes and matters to do with overseas airports where SAS might be deployed in its counter-hijacking role.
- Liaison with similar intelligence bodies overseas.
- Providing input to government intelligence assessments and travel advisories where these relate to aviation issues.
- Expert comment to the media when needed and when appropriate.

The most appropriate location for such an intelligence
body is probably within DOTARS. Staff should have an
intelligence and aviation background, and be aviation
industry-sensitive - particularly of the flow-on costs of
any recommended security measures.

(It should be noted that QANTAS has an excellent security
group, but its focus, naturally enough, is on security
issues relevant to QANTAS.)

Aircraft

Second, aircraft. The security industry recognises that
100% security on aircraft cannot be guaranteed, but I
have a few suggestions that I believe would enhance
security on aircraft:

- Duty free bottles should be banned from civilian
  aircraft passenger cabins because glass bottles can
  be broken to become dangerous weapons. (Carriers
  could still sell duty free liquor on board, but with
  delivery when passengers depart the aircraft. It
  would probably mean banning duty free liquor
  purchases before flights, and at transit stops. Duty
  free purchase is of course already available on
  arrival at Sydney airport, and this may well be the
  case at other Australian international airports.)

- QANTAS' plans to have some self-serve drink bars on
  passenger aircraft should be reconsidered because:
  some passengers could become intoxicated, and become
  a threat to others; the potential use of glass
  bottles as weapons and; because some alcohol is
  flammable. (It would be easy, for instance, to
  convert a bottle of brandy into a Molotov cocktail.)

- Passengers should not be permitted to carry bottles,
  glass or plastic, containing liquids, through
  screening and on to aircraft. Liquids could be used
  to make a binary chemical weapon, or be otherwise
  toxic or hazardous. I am talking here about larger
  bottles, not perfume bottles.

- A security "buffer zone" could be created in
  aircraft travelling overseas by only permitting
  frequent flyer passengers to be seated in, say, the
  first 10 rows closest to cockpits. This would make
  it more difficult for any passenger to rush the
  cockpit during flight when the door is opened. A
  significant vulnerability on some aircraft is the

location of a passenger toilet next to the cockpit door, which would largely defeat this approach. (New design measures being considered include toilets within cockpits, thus lessening the need to open cockpit doors in flight.)

- Government should review, with the US, UK and Israel, potential on-board systems to protect civilian aircraft from MANPADS (that is, Man Portable Air Defence Systems) when transiting higher threat areas. (There may be economies of scale to be gained from combined purchases.) The potential consequence of non-action is the loss of an aircraft, passengers and crew. In the interim, QANTAS should review its transits in daylight hours of airports in higher threat areas. (Higher threat areas being those where MANPADS are believed to be available on the illicit arms market, and where there may be groups or individuals with the intent to use them against Australian aircraft. Probably the only airport in this category at present is Bangkok.) The Defence Science and Technology Organisation (DSTO) has, I understand, a compact laser system named MURLIN under development that could be fast tracked. The aim should be to provide a low-cost Commonwealth-funded system for Australian civilian and military aircraft transiting high-risk areas. Economies might also be achievable if the system was able to be transfered between aircraft.

- Metal cutlery should be banned from aircraft because of its potential use as a weapon. A recent air rage incident resulted in a passenger incoming to Australia being stabbed in the neck with a fork. Much as I personally prefer metal cutlery, it makes our screening-out of passengers' similar items, seem nonsensical.

- Lockers and under-seat areas should be checked before passengers board aircraft. Passengers should also be required to remove their bags from aircraft at transit stops, and lockers and under-seat areas should be checked before reboarding commences. This will be demanding for flight attendants who are already under pressure to complete all set tasks, particularly at transit stops. Some time or staffing allowance would need to be made for this additional task to be undertaken.

Flying staff

Third, flying staff:

- Cabin crews should meet minimum international security proficiency standards in accordance with ICAO guidelines.

- All flight crew personnel should be required to attend security awareness training once every six months. (There is a range of security issues they should be made aware of - including the current threat situation, changes to the security environment, the need to be sensitive to stress factors involving colleagues, latest best-practice handling of air rage incidents, etc). QANTAS already provides training in many of these areas, but I am not aware of any auditing of the activity to ensure that all staff attend all relevant aspects of training on a regular basis.

- All flight crew and ground staff entering an aircraft should be security-screened before boarding to the same level as passengers.

Airports

Fourth, airports:

- New airports and airports undergoing renovation should be required to meet best practice security design requirements. (To be established by DOTARS in accordance with US and international standards.)

- Check-in staff should be made aware of stress indicators for potential hijackers and be encouraged to report any concerns about any group of passengers. (Al Qaeda hijacks normally involve a five-person cell.)

- All air-side staff should be security screened. They should be required to pass a security background check to five-years' background from the time of application. ASIO or a government-recognised security-vetting agency should conduct the check. (A particular security concern is new immigrants with uncheckable backgrounds gaining employment in sensitive air-side areas, such as baggage handling and aircraft cleaning.) Security clearances should be reviewed every five years.

Legislation

Fifth, legislation:

- Government legislation is needed to compel captains of civilian passenger aircraft to accept Air Security Officers (ASOs) on board. Two ASOs should be placed on as many overseas flights as possible.

- Government needs to give the ASO program a longer life expectancy to ensure its attractiveness to potential recruits, and to ensure staff retention. At present its continued existence is subject to review conducted every 12-18 months.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I recognise that enhanced security comes at a cost, and who pays will be an issue, but the cost of not undertaking appropriate measures to meet a credible threat is the potential loss of an aircraft and those on board. The loss of an aircraft, or deaths at an airport, as a result of a reasonably foreseeable violent incident, could ultimately see ruinous litigation against those held responsible for not implementing appropriate security measures.

The cost to the victims' families is, of course, not quantifiable.

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