

Testimony before the United States House Homeland Security Committee

The Subcommittee on Transportation Security hearing on
“Strengthening International Cooperation on Aviation Security”

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Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee. First, let me thank the Committee for inviting me to testify about the international cooperation issues surrounding aviation security.

I am Rafi Ron, President of New Age Security Solutions, a Transportation Security Consulting firm based in Dulles, VA. The company was established in the wake of the 9/11 disaster to provide more effective security solutions to airports, government agencies, and private transportation companies. Over the last nine years, we have supported numerous projects in the US and abroad involving airports, seaports and ground transportation.

Prior to founding NASS, I served as Director of Security at Tel-Aviv Ben-Gurion International Airport for a period of five years. In this position I was responsible for all aspects of the security operation and coordinating with my counterparts at airports around the world. My previous experience included more than 30 years in the field of security, intelligence, and counterterrorism for the government of Israel.

New Age Security Solutions maintains an ongoing relationship with its clients to help them adapt as the international picture evolves. As part of our continuous working relationship, we recently conducted a progress audit on our first project involving Logan Airport in Boston, Massachusetts. As you may recall, two of the 9/11 planes originated at Logan Airport. The Massachusetts Port Authority (Massport), responsible for Logan Airport, was determined to significantly improve the airport component of aviation security.

In the fall of 2001 we helped them develop and implement new security policies and elevate protection at Logan airport. A key strategy was the implementation of a behavior pattern recognition program (first of its kind in the U.S.) that trains personnel to spot aberrant activities by terrorists, independent of the specific international threat. Massport has since taken a lead role in developing the next level of airport security. Logan Airport’s achievements are widely recognized today by the federal government as well as by the aviation industry.

Transportation in general and aviation in particular, have become high-priority targets for international terrorist organizations. Consequently, it is clear that the solutions must also be international in scope. Transportation systems constitute a critical infrastructure without which our modern industrial societies cannot function. Every indication is that these systems will

remain high-risk venues for the foreseeable future. Unfortunately, key links in our transportation systems remain vulnerable to attack. Potential damages include not only a large number of casualties but also significant residual delays with major economic and political repercussions. Few other systems carry a higher level of vulnerability, with so many potential targets for terrorists who seek to act against the interests of the United States.

Since the 9/11 attacks, aviation security has received a great deal of attention and enormous resources have been dedicated to improving the system. During the last nine years, the US has become the driving force in making the domestic and global aviation system safer. Unquestionably, American aviation has become a harder target for terrorists to hit. Yet, there are still many vulnerabilities that require our attention. The question, however, is, “What investments in international cooperation will pay the highest dividends in increased security?”

I would like to focus on three areas that need attention:

- The potential for uniform minimum security standards at airports worldwide;
- The challenges in effectively sharing terrorism information with foreign countries; and
- The role professional and financial support plays in helping certain countries upgrade their aviation security.

Uniform Standards

Since the late 1940s the international community has recognized that cooperation and standardization were needed to foster an effective global aviation industry. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), a U.N. agency, was formed to insure that the global aviation system is coordinated and regulated to create a safe and secure industry. As of today 189 states are ICAO member states. Since the initial treaty (Chicago Convention 1947), 18 separate annexes have been adopted.

Annex 17 is titled “Security: Safeguarding International Civil Aviation Against Acts of Unlawful Interference.” It was updated shortly after 9/11 with the help of an international working group representing a cross section of stakeholders. I was honored to be among the participants. ICAO annex 17 is the only document today that establishes global standards for aviation security . Since the annex is based on the consensus of all ICAO member states, it establishes fairly low standard that can be achieved by countries with a limited technological infrastructure and few tradition supporting public order and law enforcement.

During the last few years, ICAO has implemented an auditing program in various parts of the world to help member states meet the Annex 17 requirements. Despite the low threshold, many countries still find it difficult to meet the standards and regularly fail the audits.

The ICAO standards were found inadequate by most of the developed world. Both the US and the European Union (EU) have issued their own standards and regulatory frameworks. The European and the American systems are based on the same principals but defer substantially in some of the actual requirements. For example, the EU recognize Advanced X-ray (AT)

screening as the standard for all bags, while the US has raised the threshold to Computerized Tomography (CT) which has a greater probability of detection. In practical terms that means a bag that was screened in Europe must be rescreened before entering the US system. In contrast, Europe requires 100% employee screening and vehicle search before personnel can enter security “sterile” zones, yet American airports are not required to do any employee screening and there is no consistent vehicle search protocols.

The goal of achieving a global “one stop security zone” throughout the aviation system that minimizes the rescreening of travelers on the one hand and provides adequate airport security on the other, still seems very far off – if not unrealistic. As long as there are countries that support terrorism and countries that have difficulty maintaining minimum performance standards, we will never reach the goal.

What can be attained appears most likely when based on bilateral agreements with friendly trustworthy countries. Through them we can reduce cost, ease operational delays and above all increase the quality of security among partner countries. The ongoing dialogue between TSA and our foreign partners is promising. But with differing standards, even bilateral negotiations are unlikely to create a true “one stop security zone” without action by the Congress and legislative bodies in partner countries.

Sharing Intelligence Information

The second issue, is the inability to readily share intelligence data across national boundaries. Intelligence data is by nature an extremely sensitive national asset and most countries are very reluctant to share it. Yet, the need to share information has proven to be critically important more than once in recent years. The latest example is the attempt against FedEx and UPS cargo flights last year. It took intelligence sharing and coordination between Saudi Arabia, the United States, the UK, Yemen, and Dubai to uncover the plot and stop the explosive devices before reaching US territory.

In sharing intelligence data, the highest value information is both specific and actionable. It is a critical layer in the US aviation security program. But we cannot assume that specific intelligence information will be available whenever someone plans a terrorist act. Indeed, all the attacks carried out against the US on 9/11 and after, lacked specific early warnings. We have learned that our best early indicators of a terrorism act are typically revealed from regular access to information about passengers and cargo. In order to implement an effective risk assessment for inbound passengers and cargo we need to have baselines and access to local terrorists watch lists, criminal history, etc. At this time, passenger risk assessments are implemented in a limited way through the “Secure Flight” program. Better access to local information will increase its effectiveness. Given the data currently available, it is important to note that relevant passenger data can be accessed without raising new privacy concerns if the program is designed correctly.

The intelligence sharing policy of most countries is bilateral in nature and goes well beyond aviation security issues. Proactive efforts by the US intelligence community and the Department of Homeland Security have created relationships and infrastructure that have proven to be very effective on many occasions. Despite the sensitivity of the intelligence data, we have been

fortunate that diverse governments have often been willing to share information when it comes to aviation security. However, the current unrest in Africa and the Middle East raises serious continuity questions for the future.

Non-secure Countries

The third aspect of international cooperation I want to highlight is the role of the United States in supporting countries that are unable to construct and operate an acceptable standard of aviation security. The US is already engaged in efforts to improve security resources in some parts of the world. This investment has historically paid very well in terms of elevating the global aviation security picture. It also lays the groundwork for better information sharing and proactive intelligence gathering. For better or worse, there is frequently a correlation between the countries that need help implementing better security protocols and the countries where terrorists are active. In this respect, TSA's efforts in Yemen should be complemented. Again, the instability in the region raises questions about future security risks.

Summary

Most of the terrorist activities against US aviation originate abroad. Every day brings hundreds of flights into US airports on foreign airlines. US carriers also have hundreds of flights that originate every day from foreign airports. The issues are mirrored in many respects on the many air cargo flights that bring parcels from foreign locations. International cooperation and coordination play a critical role. Without a high level of cooperation our vulnerability increases substantially.

Our efforts should focus on three dimensions of cooperation and coordination:

- a. Creation of bilateral "one stop security zones" with the EU and other trustworthy partner countries.
- b. Continue the proactive policy for generating and sharing relevant intelligence with foreign countries.
- c. Increase the professional and financial support to countries that are committed to upgrading their aviation security.

Thank you for your consideration.