



## “AIRLINES: STILL A TARGET FOR TERRORISTS”

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The TSA got it right - this time anyways!

A number of security events have occurred in the airline industry over the past week that warrant mention and evaluation – some of them show sound judgment by TSA and other government agencies while others show that we still have a lot of work to do:

1) The Success of BPR: Following 9/11, Boston Logan airport initiated a program called BPR, Behavior Pattern Recognition based on the premise that people about to commit a criminal act will behave differently from those going about normal business. Earlier this week, a Jamaican man’s behavior at Orlando International Airport attracted the new, behaviorally trained TSA officials, while still in line at the ticket counter he was apprehended with a reported, potential IED. This is a major accomplishment for the TSA to have begun to redefine the threat from ‘bad stuff’ to ‘bad people’. Any competent terrorist or criminal can readily turn various innocuous objects into deadly weapons. Indeed, I just finished my in-flight meal using metallic utensils, which I am sure I would not be allowed to carry through screening. It is critical that TSA continue along this path of wise use of their precious personnel and resources. Nipple rings do not constitute a threat to aviation any more than a ballpoint pen - until a dedicated terrorist utilizes it.

2) The Threat of Laser Attacks: Another news item missed by most sources in the US last week involves another source of ‘bad stuff’: Lasers. On the evening of March 29th, a coordinated laser attack occurred at the Sydney, Australia airport. Six different sources were reported to have engaged in simultaneously targeting airliners with lasers. Sydney ATC was required to close the approach corridor and shift the airliners to another route. Was this a nefarious act of “bad people’ testing, or a chronically stupid stunt? Time will hopefully tell.

Just three years ago, the U.S. airline industry suffered its first serious laser attack. A flight inbound to Salt Lake City was targeted on approach with a laser. One pilot received eye damage and had to transfer control over to the other pilot who landed the aircraft safely. No culprit was ever identified, and the injured pilot was unable to return to the cockpit for several months.

The Department of Defense and Congress took this incident very seriously. The injured pilot testified at Congressional hearings and a Pentagon USAF Major General took up the task of bringing DOD-proven technology to bear on a civilian threat. In less than 18 months, the

DOD had developed a laser eye protection (LEP) solution for the U.S. civilian airline community, a manufacturer prototyped the protective glasses. This solution was created and delivered with a price tag of \$10 million – almost a rounding error in today's government budgets.

On this occasion, DHS and FAA got it wrong. The entire package for a civilian laser eye protection solution was delivered to the appropriate officials who, in turn, gave a clear response: we do not trust the military to give us acceptable technology and testing. The agencies wanted their own costly, time-consuming test and evaluation program.

3) Directed Infrared Counter Measures: The last T&E program that comes to the forefront is DIRCM, Directed Infra Red Counter Measures. This is a system to use DOD proven technology to protect aircraft against shoulder launched anti-aircraft missiles. The system is demonstrably very effective for combat operations. However, after DHS spent \$250M on T&E, it is no closer to being deployed on US airliners and is non-starter for the industry due operating costs. At \$60 per barrel for oil, the average profit for any flight would be alone exceeded in costs associated with DIRCM. And current US export regulations will not allow a DIRCM equipped airliner to leave the US, where the highest threat is likely.

These are just three examples illustrating that the threat to airliners is real, and it is not going away in my lifetime. The situation in Orlando is an example of TSA proactively addressing a 21st century threat. Airliners in the United States take hundreds of laser hits every year, but to date, they have been benign.

On the other side of the spectrum, the action is lacking. The USAF Major General who led the LEP group opened its first meeting with the promise that this time, we will not wait for 'blood on the ground'. And yet DHS and the FAA have done nothing in almost two years to connect the dots with an affordable solution.

There are many threat vectors and too few dollars. We need to get it right continuously while the 'bad people' only need to get it right occasionally. By leveraging our technology and 'smart people,' the United States can meet many threats by spending, working and flying wisely and efficiently.

TSA, you got it right: let's build on success.