The Prestidigitation of Aviation Security

By

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There's the old saying, "Today is the first day of the rest of your life". Meaning, of course, that no matter how much you screwed up your life up to this point, you now have the opportunity to finally start getting your life on the right track – starting today.

Now, in the hallowed halls of the swamp of Washington, DC there are serious discussions going on regarding re-inventing commercial aviation security – yet again. Should we privatize or shouldn't we, and to what degree? A change in aviation security that is long overdue!

This is the third time we've been put through this charade. The first time began in roughly the 1970's and 80's under FAA's version of security and we all know how well that worked out. More on that later.

Then TSA burst forth after the 9/11 attacks with virtually unlimited tax dollars and untold thousands of new employees shuffling papers around at its Hq, regional and local offices. These thousands don't include the 50,000 or so screeners, several thousand air marshals, and others who are actually doing security work at airports.

Aside from the massive amounts of waste, fraud, and abuse as documented in countless news reports for the past 25 years, AND horrendously poor performance of its screening checkpoints based on its own testing protocols; there are some who laud TSA for its primary accomplishment: We haven't had a terrorist attack since 9/11. But this is an outright asinine assessment. There are two main reasons terrorists haven't seriously targeted commercial aviation in this country since 9/11. The first is that passengers and crews are more alert to the threat, and the other is that no would be terrorist has an interest in attacking commercial aviation – yet.

I recall a few months before 9/11, after being confronted with an internal assessment of the blatant vulnerabilities in aviation security, a senior FAA security manager stated, "We must be doing something right, we haven't had a terrorist attack since the last one"; referring to the PanAm 103 bombing over 10 years before.

In fact, it was the disaster of PanAm 103 that should and could have been THE turning point in really enhancing commercial aviation security. But that was not to be, which in turn, led directly to the 9/11 attacks. As a result of the PanAm 103 bombing, some brilliant individual(s) (and I mean this with no sarcasm whatsoever) created a Red Team within the bureaucracy of FAA Security. Its basic mission was three fold:

First: to make assessments of the airport environment (not just the screening checkpoint) to determine how vulnerable the system was to exploitation.

Second: to project the next most likely terrorist attack so that effective countermeasures can be instituted to deter that attack.

Third: the Red Team reported directly to the Associate Administrator for Security in FAA there-by by passing all the political and bureaucratic influences in between.

And we did just that. Steve Elson was one of the first Red Team leaders during the first half of the 90's. I replaced him as a Red Team leader in the late 90's. To make a very long story short: we concluded that not only was FAA's version of security a sad joke, but we knew that the US was going to be hit hard by terrorism and that it would be via commercial aviation (based on information the entire Washington DC swamp completely ignored). We worked through the bureaucracies of FAA, the Department of Transportation, the General Accounting Office and individual members of a brain-dead Congress trying to wake them up to the threat and the vulnerabilities. (We were later joined by Brian Sullivan, who, while not a Red Team member, had his own gifted insight in the matter.)

In the lead up to the attacks the official intelligence on terrorism was as inept as FAA proved to be. I recall Elson making the observation that, "the FBI, CIA, and all the other national security bureaucracies couldn't find a bowel movement in the diarrhea ward of a hospital".

The FAA Red Team was the only organizational unit in the entire federal government that accurately predicted the 9/11 attacks starting 2 or 3 years before the event. During the first week of TSA's existence, one of the first things the bureaucrats did was terminate the Red Team and replace it with what I called a "Pink Team" in my testimony in front of the 9/11 Commission. Learning the hard way that upsetting the bureaucracy is a

greater sin than letting thousands of innocent people die horribly when it could have been prevented. And 25 years after 9/11 TSA/Congress still haven't secured airplane cockpits while in-flight, something that could have saved billions of dollars spent on irrelevant programs. So its no surprise to me that we are now working on the third iteration of commercial aviation security. The only thing that surprises me is that it took so long.

YES, aviation security should be privatized, but in typical government fashion, they are going about it the wrong way – AGAIN.

The first thing they need to do is keep the airlines out of doing their own security (outside of securing the cockpit in flight, locking their own doors, employee background checks and other relatively minor but important functions).

From my observations and assessment the reason FAA failed to prevent the 9/11 attacks was actually quite simple: The airline industry bribed Congress thru lobbying (and possibly other perks) to minimize any security enhancements that would cost them money or time. Congress, in turn, picked agency heads like Jane Garvey (who was the FAA Administrator on 9/11, whom they knew would play the game) as the head illusionist for FAA. Garvey, in turn, picked senior bureaucrats that ran the day to operations who were only too willing to sell their souls to whomever paid them. Most of whom, if not all, were promoted after 9/11 for their loyalty in keeping quiet.

When you consider that within two weeks of 9/11 the Congress gave the airline industry $15,000,000,000 of tax payers money AND later bribed the victim's families with lucrative by-outs in exchange for not engaging in lawsuits, not to mention that no one was held accountable for criminal incompetence or negligence; the piddly monies the airline industry used to bribe Congress had to be the best lobbying effort in the entire history of the United States. And, of course, none of this is mentioned in the 9/11 Commission book; which shouldn't be a surprise since most of the commission members had a strong association with the airline industry.

Ok, so given the atmosphere of the swamp of Washington DC, what do we do next?

Commercial aviation security should rest on the shoulders of each and every individual airport authority. No body knows more about what goes on at an airport more so than the airport authority itself. Not the airlines, and

certainly not the TSA. Every airport tenant has their own little piece of the pie but it's the airport authority that ties it all together. Whether its construction of a new fuel farm at a remote site in the airport, snow removal, and any of a thousand different things that make an airport run smoothly. One has to keep in mind that aviation security isn't just the screening checkpoint. Its access control around the entire airport as well as many other components not routinely mentioned in the press.

The bulk of the money for security should come from the landing fees of the airlines, which in turn comes from the ticket prices of the passengers. TSA should be disbanded or at least greatly reduced. A small pre 9/11 FAA- like inspection force would be necessary to ensure compliance with the national security standards.

And I can't emphasize enough the importance of each airport having their own Red Team to ascertain what the unique vulnerabilities really are at each individual airport and not just rely on a government issued security manual. There also has to be some accountability. Not, of course, for being a target of terrorism necessarily, but for demonstrated incompetence in fulfilling this role. Airport managers would be clamoring for real security professionals rather than the available army of the paper pushing misfits of TSA.

Of course, whether this turns out to be just another dog and pony show like the FAA before it, or just a cheaper version of the TSA, it depends on a real commitment by our Congressional representatives to correct the problems that led up to the 9/11 attacks as well as the nefarious aftereffects that they are also responsible for.

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Mr. Dzakovic was an FAA Red Team Security leader before 9/11. Red Teams were responsible for monitoring the levels of efficiency of airport security and reporting same. In these efforts, major failures were uncovered at several airports, including at Boston Logan. In that case, they warned in May of 2001 that the airport could be the target of multiple hijackings. This was ignored at all levels.

Mr Dzakovic subsequently after 9/11 filed complaints under Whistleblower protection statues regarding other major security failures. As a result, he endured retaliation and abuse from the FAA and others in the George W. Bush administration, which denigrated him to minor tasks and destroyed his career.

He is also author of *Fortress of Deceit: The Story of a 9/11 Whistleblower,* which is a fact-based book published covering his experiences. It is available at Amazon.com