

Forum: General Assembly First Committee

Issue: Measures to standardize international air travel security

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Introduction

About one in 1.3 million passengers die from aircraft accidents. Air travel security has not always been a concern. Back in the 70s, air travel was considered a luxury and was priced so that only the elites of the society could afford to travel in such an exclusive manner.

The infamous hijacking case of (Dan) D. B. Cooper brought air travel safely into media attention. Cooper, the fake name of the person who hijacked a Boeing 727 was brought into the spotlight in 1971, when he demanded a sum of \$200,000. Upon receiving the money, he lowered the airstair and parachuted down.



The impact of the hijacking brought massive media attention as Cooper was never seen again after the escape. It was what caused some of the most drastic changes in the aviation industry, in regards to safety. Metal detectors were placed in airports, and changes were made to the Boeing 727 to ensure that an airway cannot be lowered during flight.

Overtime, more measures were imposed. When a bomb killed 270 passengers in 1998, the Federal Aviation Administration decided to screen electronics and to only allow bags to be brought on board if they are accompanied by a passenger.

With the passing of time, the method that terrorists or plane hijackers used has seen advancements in technology. Yet, air travel security has remained quite the same. For many years, metal has been the focus for conducting security checks in the airport before a passenger boards a plane. The September 11 hijacking had woken up the public, and caused people to question the effectiveness of air travel security.

Recently, certain countries have implemented a ban on carrying any sorts of liquid abroad an airplane that is traveling to them. Nowadays, governments claim to be planning ahead to prepare against possible methods of hijacking, not excluding the methods of chemical or biological weapons.

Despite this, however, there are huge variations in the number of safety precautions placed in air travel, which differs from countries. The differences mean that some flights might be more prone to hijacks than others, which is the focus of this issue.

Key Term

Air travel security

It is usually assumed that this term refers to the rules implemented on passengers. However, it actually covers more than that. Air travel security should also include factors such as “catering, maintenance, cleaning, ticketing, baggage handling, air traffic control, retail, food services, parking, car rental and others” (Harris).

General overview of the Topic

There are huge variations when it comes to international air travel security. For countries such as the US and the UK, tight security has been imposed due to a rising number of attempted terrorist attacks onboard in the recent years. Capital cities or cities of greater economic and social importance generally have tighter airport security than others, even within the same country. Because of this, flights flying from a certain location are more vulnerable to attacks from terrorists and hijackers.

This is often justified by the argument that certain countries are more likely to get terrorist attacks, possibly due to their political standpoint, therefore, more regulations are needed to ensure the safety of the aircraft and the passengers.

However, this is a naïve assumption, because the motives behind air travel attacks are not solely inclusive of terrorism. Attacks that are driven by money are also possible. In such cases, hijackers can simply choose to board a flight from a city with less security regulations.

Problems standing in the way of standardizing international air travel security include that of the financial ability of the country. Less Economically Developed Countries might find it difficult to install technological equipments that are needed for air travel security because they might not have the financial means to do so.

The result of this is the More Economically Developed Countries being equipped with the latest technological equipments, while the LEDCs have to use older equipments, which might not be as accurate or as efficient. For instance, the US is in the process of developing equipments which would allow any threats hidden in shoes to be detected without requiring the shoes to be taken off, and fingerprint scanners that can also detect traces of explosive materials on a person's fingers.

The quality of screeners may also vary. Security personnel who are in charge of monitoring the x-ray scans and performing body searches are essential in achieving air travel safety. However, there is no international standard for the quality of the screeners. A poorly-skilled screener would significantly reduce the effectiveness of x-ray scans.

In 2004, the UK started experimenting with the backscatter x-ray machines, which provides a 360-degree view of the person. Despite its efficiency and accuracy, some consider the scans as violations of human rights, due to the extremely detailed nature of the scans. Because of this, the US, which was also planning to implement this method, has put the plans on hold until the manufacturers of the x-ray can find ways to automatically mask certain parts of the body. This is another obstacle that stands in the way of standardizing international air travel security. Different countries have different values, for instance, the full-body search performed in many airports might not be socially acceptable in some conservative countries.

Air travel security does not only include hijacking or sorts, there have been a shockingly large number of people who have died on airplanes (Daily Herald) (about 260 deaths in 2006). Most of these deaths are of natural causes, such as heart attacks and asthma. Commercial airplanes are equipped with emergency medical supplies, which is the only supply stored on flight that could potentially save a person's life. Because of the limited space on flight, any procedures are conducted in front of other passengers. As a matter of fact, in the unfortunate event that the passenger dies, in some cases, he/she is merely covered and kept buckled in his/her seat.

The fact that those onboard are only made available to the most basic of medical help has raised concerns over the safety of the passengers. Moreover, the public has voiced concerns over the lack of policies governing the procedure dealing with in-flight deaths. As of now, airlines are not required to release any details concerning how they deal with such situations, because there are no policies that require them to do so. This leads to the lack of transparency and consistency, which makes it hard to standardize air travel security.

Flight accidents (from ACRO)

Year	Deaths	# of accidents
2009	1,103	122
2008	884	156
2007	971	147
2006	1,294	166
2005	1,459	185
2004	771	172
2003	1,230	199

2002	1,413	185
2001	1,534	200
2000	1,582	189
1999	1,138	211

UN Perspective

The United Nations has set up the International Civil Aviation Organization in hopes of providing a standard for air travel security. However, despite the urgency of the issue, not much has been done to address it. Ultimately, they strive to strengthen already-existing international laws that govern the aviation industry, as well as create any other necessary policies.

Major countries and organizations involved and their positions

Israel

Besides the conventional procedure taken in airport security, airports in Israel use racial profiling to identify potential terrorists. Those who appear to be Arab are interrogated by Israeli officers. This method has been criticized by many civil rights groups, who feel that racial profiling might lead to racism. However, the Israeli government insists that the method is in fact effective.

International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)

The ICAO is a specialized United Nations agency that regulates international air travel. The agency was established through the signing of the document for the Convention on International Civil Aviation on December 7, 1944. ICAO is an agency of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The main purpose of the organization is to “develop the principles and techniques of international air navigation and to foster the planning and development of international air transport” (ICAO).



For safety purposes, the ICAO is responsible for standardizing the format of passports internationally, to ensure that they are machine-readable.

The ICAO is composed of an Assembly, a Council, and other bodies.

Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

The mission of the FAA is to provide the safest, most efficient aerospace system in the world. It is an agency of the US Department of Transportation. In 1926, the US government realizes that an agency needs to be established to ensure the safety of aviation, so that the commercial aviation industry can grow. Over time, the name of the agency changes, until it has finally adopted the name of “Federal Aviation Agency” in 1967. The major role of the FAA is to regulate aspects relating to aviation in the US, relating directly and indirectly to the subject.

The major roles of the FAA include to:

- Regulate US commercial aviation transportation
- Regulate flight inspection standards
- Overlook the development of new aviation technology
- Manage pilot certificates
- Overlook local offices to ensure safety in civil aviation
- Operate the system for air traffic control and navigation for civil and military aircraft
- Develop the National Airspace System
- Regulate environmental effects of aviation

Standpoint

FAA maintains that they achieve safety in the air through transparency, with moral soundness, collaboration, as well as innovation. However, the FAA has been

criticized for its leniency towards airlines, and also for the soft and often ineffective penalties that are imposed on airlines violating FAA policies.

International Air Transport Association (IATA)

IATA is a global trade organization for commercial airlines, founded in 1945, representing 93% of all scheduled international air traffic. It is represented in more than 150 countries, with 230 airlines as its member.

Major roles of the IATA

- Simplifying the ticket purchase process
- Keeping the price of tickets down
- Establish clearly defined rules and regulations for airlines
- Communicate the issues that arise in the aviation industry to the respective governments
- Communicate with passengers about concerns brought up with airlines, and vice versa
- Ensure safety in all air travel
- Reduce impact of air travel on the environment

Standpoint

IATA would typically make decision in the interest of the airlines, rather than the passengers.

The European Organization for the Safety of Air Navigation (EUROCONTROL)

EUROCONTROL was founded in 1963. It is an international organization, with 38 member states, all of which are in Europe. The organization strives to “improve the overall performance, safety, and sustainability of European air transport” (EUROCONTROL).

Timeline of Events

1944: The Convention on International Civil Aviation was signed by 52 member states.

1969: The Convention was put into effect.

1971: The D.B Cooper hijacking incident has made the aviation industry realize that security measures are needed.

1972: The FAA set up a policy that requires all passengers and their luggage to be checked. The metal detectors were used.

1985: Due to the failure of airport security to detect a bomb that was carried onboard by a passenger, 329 people were killed, marking the single deadliest air travel incident.

1998: Following another airplane bombing which killed 270 people, FAA required electronics to be scanned with extra caution on flights from Europe and the Middle East.

2001: The September 11 attacks reflected many flaws in the air travel security regulations. The US revised and added policies, which further limited the items that can be carried onboard.

2004: The UK is testing out a controversial method of screening passengers, in which the new technology could reveal the shape of the person's body. The detailed nature of the scans have caused public outcry against the technology, with many citing the complete lack of privacy as their main reason.

2006: The latest revision of the ninth edition of the Convention.

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Convention on International Civil Aviation

Perhaps the most important treaty signed in terms of standardizing international air travel security is the Convention on International Civil Aviation, signed by 52 member states on December 7, 1944 in Chicago. It was ratified in 1947, and has finally become effective on October 24, 1968. In total, the Convention has been revised eight times. The 2006 edition is the newest version.

A part of the Convention deals with standardizing practices and procedures concerning air travel. Article 37 from Part I, Chapter VI, International Standards and Recommended Practices, deals with this issue. This includes the rules of air travel control practices, registration of aircraft, licensing of personnel, etc. Part III of the Convention might also be useful for international air travel.

Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (IRTPA)

It is an Act of Congress (US) enacted on December 17, 2004 that deals with the issue of terrorism. Part of the act touched upon transportation security, which included aviation security. Another part of the act deals specifically with the September 11 attacks, with terrorist travel and effective screening being one of the subtitles, which prompted the improvement of the technology for detecting explosives that is used in airports.

Possible Solutions

The scope of this issue allows for a lot of innovative solutions. The list below should serve as a starting point. Effective evaluation should be given to the possible solutions to further develop them into solutions that are more feasible.



1. The setting up of an international fund that can help LEDCs to afford better equipments for airport security.

Factor(s) to consider: Where will the funding come from? Which countries are in need of the fund? Is it sustainable?

2. Increase transparency of flight policies.

Factor(s) to consider: Which area of air travel requires more transparency?

3. Investigate the motives behind air travel attacks to show that all countries may be vulnerable.

Factor(s) to consider: There are countries which have experienced little or no aviation attacks. How can they be convinced that it is essential to have thorough regulations for air travel security? Is the expenditure worth it?

4. Require all airlines to clearly state the procedures that they would take during an emergency.
5. Encourage more countries to sign the Convention on International Civil Aviation.

Factor(s) to consider: How can the UN help the nations which are not member states?

6. ICAO should consider standardizing the quality of personnel related to the air travel security, such as screeners or flight attendants.

Factor(s) to consider: Should the personnel be required to attain some sort of international license that is agreed upon by all member states, given the nature and the importance of their jobs?

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