

Homeland security thesis examples

[Engineering](#), [Aviation](#)



Even with the stricter security measures that have been put in place in the U. S. since September 11, 2001, a terrorist attack like that planned by Nizar Hindawi and the Syrian government against an El Al plane might have succeeded. He had been provided with a suitcase bomb containing Semtex, which was virtually undetectable by x-ray or other screening devices, and was using a ' cut-out' to actually carry the bomb aboard the plane, an accomplice who did not know she had a bomb and would have been killed with the rest of the passengers had it gone off. Only a very alert security staff noticed that this passenger's behavior and answers to questions were suspicious and did not fit the expected profile led to the detection of her suitcase bomb. Had they not questioned her closely, the plane would have been destroyed and all its passengers killed. No matter that the U. S. now has more security personnel, sky marshals and advanced security equipment, such an attack could still succeed today. This brings up the delicate question of profiling, but the fact remains that the Israelis have long since developed a very comprehensive and efficient system of questioning passengers and recognizing those who might be a potential threat.

Below is a newspaper story. After reading it, answer the following question: How would you -- if you were in a position to address it and given current technology -- prevent this type of terrorist act? Can the Israeli approach to airport security as outlined here work in the U. S.?

INTRODUCTION

The attempt by Nizar Hindawi to blow up an El Al plane in 1986 was an example of state-sponsored terrorism, in this case by Hafiz al-Asad, the father of the current dictator of Syria. Unlike the September 11th terrorists,

though, Hindawi's motive was money more than ideology or religious zeal, and he was recruited for this task by the Syrian ambassador to Britain and then trained in Syria. They also provided him with his passports and visas, as well as a suitcase bomb containing Semtex explosives, which were almost undetectable by airport X-ray machines. He found a former girlfriend to act as a naïve and unwitting accomplice to carry the bomb aboard the Israeli plane, and had it gone off the aircraft would have been blown up over Austria five hours later. Israeli security grew suspicious of her because she admitted that she had not packed the bag herself, nor could she explain why as unmarried, pregnant Irish women with no friends or relatives in Israel she would wish to travel there alone. Her answers about where she was staying and how much money she had brought with her were also unsatisfactory. At that point, they searched her bag and found the explosives (Pipes 1989). In this case, only the careful screening by alert security personnel prevented this disaster, and this should be part of the standard procedure in every airport.

Prior to September 11th, the worst case scenario imagined by risk managers and insurance companies was that two passenger planes would collide, or that hijackers would take over planes and demand money or the freeing of political prisoners. After September 11th, they could imagine terrorists who would use nuclear, chemical or biological weapons to destroy a large city. Airport and airline security, however, is based on the premise that “ we need to be right all the time, the terrorist needs only to be right once” (Kennedy and McGarrell, 2011, p. 3). Their risk management policy is that all terrorist attacks must be prevented in humanly possible because the industry simply

cannot withstand another catastrophe like September 11th. British Airways now has a very comprehensive risk assessment system at every level, with all risk leaders meeting quarterly with the head of Risk Management. It also uses a new system of risk assessment software called Aceptus. In dealing with terrorism, its policy is one of risk avoidance, and the company “ will do everything to avoid this risk, for example, stricter security checks”. Even if this means longer waiting periods for customers, BA still follows a “ safety first” policy (Punzel 2008, p. 18).

The main goal of terrorism is to promote fear and insecurity in the public mind all out of proportion to the actual military and economic damage that terrorist groups can inflict. This is why they depend heavily on mass media publicity to spread anxiety and fear, and if the perception of the threat is great enough then there will be greater “ willingness to place restrictions on civil liberties to increase safety and security” (Breckenridge and Zimbardo 2007, p. 117). Terrorists also understand that dramatic televised images of their acts have a greater impact and shock value than print stories. Airline passengers will demand more intensive security screenings, while at the same time become irritated at the delays, long lines and invasion of privacy. Fear will also stimulate a “ pessimistic assessment of risk”, although airlines and passengers will generally assume that someone else is always more likely to be a victim of terrorism rather than themselves (Breckenridge and Zimbardo, p. 118).

There are over 28, 000 flights each day in the U. S. alone, and 850, 000 each month, which arrive and depart from over 400 major airports. In these facilities there are “ thousands of skilled and unskilled workers who pass,

unsecured, in and out of employee entrances as they provide routine and ongoing access to hundreds of catering and service vehicles” (Seidenstat 2009, p. 3). Obviously the potential risk of terrorist infiltration through this route alone is enormous. Terrorists and hijackers today are far more skilled and sophisticated than their counterparts from forty years ago, when most airport and airline security systems were put in place. Contemporary terrorists like Al Qaeda are well-funded, well-trained, well-financed, and prepared to die for their cause. Security under these circumstances is a relative concept rather than an absolute one, since even with “ unlimited resources” some terrorists are always going to get through the multiple layers of security (Seidenstat, p. 4). At some point, the law of diminishing returns will also become applicable to expenditures on security, and risk assessment in airline security is a “ minimization problem, requiring an effort that will match overall security benefits with security costs consistent with allocation of resources that will convey a sense of security to the population” (Seidenstat, p. 4).

Use of electronic screening and computer databases and recognition systems is designed to reduce redundancy in security and lower costs, including fingerprint and iris recognition and new screening machines that operate like MRIs. Unfortunately “ neither the existence nor the purchase of the latest technology ensures security. All technologies are fallible, in one capacity or another” (Seidenstat, p. 9). In large organizations security personnel often deviate from regulations and norms, which has often occurred at U. S. and British airports, and one of the major failures has been in the screening of carry-on luggage. Mark Salter even denied that risk

management was an “ appropriate model for the provision of public safety”, and argued that screening should be separated from the security function. Essentially, screeners should concentrate solely on visual inspection of baggage, applying the same universal standard to all of it. Profiling and sifting of passengers is a flawed process in any case, and “ without better intelligence, a risk-based selective screening process may not be successful” (Seidenstat, p. 11).

All security systems must be continually evaluated and improved to account for new risks and threats, and function as a dynamic rather than a static system. Once passenger and baggage screening is in place and the targets have been secured, avoiding damage becomes increasingly expensive. Airport and airline security measures involve access, the airport perimeter, screening passengers, luggage and cargo, and intelligence information on passengers. Security has as many as twenty layers, including fourteen for pre-boarding and six in-flight, which include intelligence, customs, no-fly lists, security vetting of aircrew and ground personnel, use of canine inspections, behavioral observation, travel documents, bomb inspection officers and screening checked baggage. In-flight security includes air marshals and flight deck officers, hardened cockpit doors, police and flight crews (Seidenstat, p. 5). In 2008, a government report described this as a “ multi-layered, multi-modal, total security system”, although the Government Accountability Office found that more security measures were required for airport perimeters and restricted areas, vetting of airport workers, detection of explosives at checkpoints and foreign air cargo screening (Seidenstat, p. 6). Risk assessment specialists have more information today than ever

before about how to protect airlines, but not about “ the most effective mix of aircraft screeners, air marshals, reinforced cockpits, control or airport access, and so on”, and in the U. S. at least no single officer controls all these aspects of security (Seidenstat, p. 8).

More controversial by far is the policy of passenger profiling, usually based on ethnic and religious characteristics that targets passengers from Muslim countries or young males with Arabic or Muslim names and backgrounds. In the U. S. as well, this policy of police profiling of young black males for police stops and harassment, and such activities as “ shopping while black’ or ‘ driving while black’. Informally, of course, this type of police profiling has been going on for many years, and by no means only in the United States. After September 11th airlines and security agencies applied these profiles to the new group of young makes considered most likely to commit terrorist acts, although the risk with these is that persons stopped, searched or banned from flying unjustly may sue the airlines and civil rights grounds. On paper at least, profiling is designed to “ identify passengers who pose a threat to aircraft security and subject them to additional screening”, although inevitably certain racial, ethnic and religious groups are usually going to be the subject of the most scrutiny (Tan, 2005, p. 237). Profiled passengers are then separated into categories ranging from those considered risk-free to those placed on no-fly lists after further background screening.

CONCLUSION

It took the collective shock and trauma of September 11, 2001 for the U. S. to begin to put in place the kind of thorough and comprehensive airline security measures that Israel has already had for decades. Airlines decided that they could never permit another attack like this or they would be driven out of business. As it was, their stock prices collapsed and passenger schedules did not return to pre-September 11th levels for four years. All previous security plans were judged to be useless and inadequate, and were taken out of the hands of private security contractors and turned over to the federal government. From now on, the worst case scenario in risk assessment became not just a group of scruffy hijackers but groups of disciplined, well-financed fanatics who were prepared to use nuclear, chemical and biological weapons to destroy millions of civilians in suicide attacks. This was a frightening scenario indeed, and security was upgraded accordingly to levels never imagined before. Nor will security ever be reduced to pre-September 11 levels again—not in our lifetime—given the assumption that these kinds of terrorists are going to persist in their attacks for decades. They may be based in a variety of countries, but their determination to carry out such attacks against civilians shows no signs of abating. Security technology may be changed and upgraded in the years ahead, and develop in a high tech direction in hopes that it will make future attacks like these impossible. Given the influence of the United States, this intensified security measures are going to be applied to airlines and airports worldwide, just as they have been for the past ten years.

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