



INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION

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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 14: Aviation security
Agenda Item 14.2: Universal Security Audit Programme (USAP)

GLOBAL THREAT TO CIVIL AVIATION: THE ROLE OF ICAO

(Presented by Canada)

SUMMARY

Civil aviation stands today under very serious terrorist threat, calling for a correspondingly robust response on the part of ICAO. The scope for terrorists to exploit the network character of civil aviation in order to reach their targets lends importance to work now under way to clarify and strengthen existing Annex 17 Standards and Recommended Practices, and to the results of this work being considered and acted upon expeditiously.

1. THE TERRORIST THREAT TO INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION

1.1 Transport systems by their nature offer tempting targets to those who aspire to inflict political, economic, human and psychological damage on their “enemies”. Aviation meets those criteria particularly well, offering a prospect of high profile mass casualties and extensive collateral damage. Since 11 September 2001 there have been many terrorist attacks and attempted attacks, including upon aviation interests, in many countries around the world.

1.2 Current intelligence allows no room for doubt that terrorist networks inspired by Osama Bin Laden remain as focused as ever on targeting civil aviation, both in itself and as a means of attack. It is clear that a new level has been reached in terms of the threat to aviation, and that this is not merely a temporary trend. The terrorist challenge to civil aviation is innovative, determined and global in character, and requires a commensurate response from those responsible for countering it.

2. THE ROLE OF ICAO

2.1 ICAO, as the relevant United Nations body, is key amongst those with such a responsibility. In the aftermath of 11 September, the organisation acted quickly and decisively to reinforce global civil aviation security, notably in mandating better flight deck security and by inaugurating and delivering a global audit regime. With the threat to civil aviation as real today as ever, evidenced most recently in attacks in Russia and Turkey, and against the background of numerous threats

to civil aviation worldwide, ICAO must respond again with vigour, despatch and resolve. It must ensure both that Contracting States apply effectively the security measures laid down in Annex 17, and that those measures are kept fully commensurate with the threat.¹

2.2 Some Member States may consider that the terrorist threat does not apply to them. Analysis of the threat, against the background of the network character of civil aviation, demonstrates that such a view would be mistaken, and dangerous in its consequences. Al Qaeda can be expected to exploit inconsistencies in protective security measures between one state and another, thus displacing the threat to wherever security arrangements are perceived to be most open to attack. It is the responsibility of all States to ensure that they are not seen as having a protective security regime that will allow terrorists entry to the network in order to target other States or their civil aviation assets. Throughout the world, many state borders and national airports are only minutes apart in flying time. The threat is common to all, and all are in the firing line.

3. PRESENT WORK IN ICAO

3.1 The 12th meeting of ICAO's Aviation Security Panel established a Working Group to prepare the 11th Amendment to Annex 17, tasked with improving the wording of Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) in order to make Annex 17 easier to use in the context of the Universal Security Audit Programme. Initial proposals were considered at the Panel's 14th meeting, but work was subsequently delayed by outside factors.

3.2 At its meeting in May this year, the Panel agreed to re-establish the Working Group on Amendment 11 and to broaden its remit to encompass the strengthening of key SARPs, so that Annex 17 is more fully commensurate with the level of threat. Critical areas were identified for attention, amongst them the screening of unaccompanied bags, aircraft security checks, access control, staff screening, hold baggage screening, and flight deck security.

4. TIMELINESS IN ICAO PROCESSES

4.1 The Aviation Security Panel has also identified the importance of ICAO not allowing procedural inflexibility to slow or deflect its efforts to meet the current threat. Adaptability needs to be shown in the frequency of meetings, the promptness with which recommendations are brought before and considered by ICAO's decision-making bodies, and the speed with which they are subsequently promulgated. The present Working Group on Amendment 11 will report by the end of the calendar year: it will be imperative that consideration of the results of its work, and the promulgation of any changes to Annex 17, are then expedited, so that new, clear and effective SARPs are in place at the earliest possible date, consistent with proper review.

¹ In May 2004 the ICAO AVSEC Panel was briefed confidentially by UK and US intelligence agencies on the nature and track record of Al Qaeda, its modus operandi, and its likely forward strategy. Amongst the broad conclusions were that AQ would continue to target civil aviation; that inconsistencies in protective security measures could lead to the 'displacement' of the threat to wherever security arrangements looked most susceptible; and that all States were therefore at risk, owing to the global reach and nature of modern civil aviation.

5. **ACTION BY THE ASSEMBLY**

5.1 The Assembly is invited:

- a) To note the very serious and continuing threat to civil aviation, as marking a new threat “plateau” and requiring a correspondingly robust response on the part of ICAO;
- b) To note the potential for terrorists to exploit the network character of civil aviation, and inconsistencies between one protective security regime and another, in order to target States or their civil aviation assets indirectly; and
- c) To instruct the Council to expedite the consideration and implementation of the results of work presently under way to both clarify and strengthen existing Annex 17 SARPs.
- d) To instruct the Secretary General to phase-in AVSEC starting with the 2005-06-07 programme budget.

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