

## Canada needs comprehensive national aviation security plan, say experts

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Despite recent decisions to put full-body scanners and a new passenger behaviour observation program into Canada's airports, security experts say Canada's airports remain rife with security problems and a comprehensive national aviation security plan is needed.

Instead of being proactive, critics say, the government is reacting to security breaches as they arise, and "cherry picking" security measures of questionable effectiveness at the command of the United States.

In early January, following the attempted bombing of a U.S. flight by an al-Qaeda agent with explosives in his underwear, the government announced two new security measures. The government purchased 44 full-body scanners, and also announced a new system would be developed to help the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority spot potential terrorists.

Tendered on Jan. 11, the Passenger Behaviour Observation Program will train CATSA officials to use "risk-based security principles to screen passengers and identify those with potential malicious intent." Inspired by similar security measures used in Israel and the U.S., the program will be a pilot project to determine how a made-in-Canada program would work and how much it would cost.

While Transport Minister John Baird (Ottawa West Nepean, Ont.) said the choice to implement these two programs were "sovereign" Canadian decisions, he said that Canada must keep pace with U.S. security measures to avoid being branded a "weak link" by enemies and allies alike.

Transport Canada denied *The Hill Times'* request for a background briefing, and would not provide a comprehensive description of Canada's aviation security policy and procedures. In an email, however, Transport Canada said the security measures in Canadian airports include: pre-board screening of passengers and baggage, locking and reinforcement of cockpit doors, in-flight security officers on selected flights, the screening of air cargo and the implementation of the No-Fly List.

Rafi Sela, an Israeli security expert who has advised CATSA and Public Safety, offered a scathing assessment of Canadian aviation security, calling it "pathetic."

When asked what the biggest gaps are in Canada's system today, he replied: "The biggest gap right now is that you don't do security," Mr. Sela said in a telephone interview. "What you're doing is political PR: trying to convince the public that there is security at the airport...you're trying to screen some of the passengers in an unreliable and inefficient way, and the airport is not secure."

Mr. Sela said the decision to purchase body scanners is a "disaster," and a mere reactionary measure that will not increase aviation security on its own.

"What is missing is your security plan," he said. "You have to be ahead of the game, and not reacting to the game, and that's what the security in North America is doing."

The much-lauded Israeli approach to aviation security starts well before passengers arrive at the airport itself. As passengers approaching the terminal at Ben Gurion International, a security officer will approach all cars and ask a series of benign questions often as simple as "What did you have for dinner last night?"

Israeli airport security officials, often senior university students, are well-paid and trained to detect the signs of stress and preoccupation that someone on the verge of committing murderous attacks would display. Profiling, as well as tell-tale signs like sweating and problems answering simple questions help the officers decide who to allow passage to the airport, and who may be a threat.

Israeli security officers patrol throughout the airport, and while they will not hesitate to search suspicious persons and baggage, do not search every passenger as matter of course.

The Israeli approach, he said, focuses more on catching bombers than bombs.

With these techniques, he said, the so-called 'underwear bomber' "would have been stopped in Ben Gurion before he even entered the terminal."

At present, he said, Canadian airport security officers are focusing their attention in the wrong areas, and should start paying more attention to people, not bags.

"If you know the people are bad, not the luggage, why do you check the luggage and not the people?" Mr. Sela asked.

The combination of low-paid workers and low technology—which he considers body scanners to be—is resulting in very low levels of aviation security in Canada. He added that the

Behaviour Observation Program will provide "nothing even close" to Israeli levels of security because "if it is not part of a well thought out plan, you're still not safe."

Mr. Sela is not alone in doubting the effectiveness of Canada's aviation security measures.

David Jeanes, president of Transport Action Canada, previously called Transport 2000, said he thinks Canada has much to learn from the Israeli approach, and its focus on the "psychology of terrorism, not the mechanics."

He noted that intelligence work thwarted the 2006 liquid bomb plot in Britain, and said he doubts whether additional detection measures such as body scanners will prove as effective as the government hopes.

"Basically, reacting to each incident by putting new processes in place to make sure the same thing isn't necessarily a very good way because the terrorists always come up with some new mode of attack that hasn't been tried before," Mr. Jeanes said. "Aviation security depends a lot on having good intelligence about potential threats."

Liberal Sen. Colin Kenny, chair of the Senate National Security and Defence Committee, described the state of Canada's aviation security as "a mess."

Sen. Kenny said he was "surprised that al-Qaeda hasn't done something here yet," adding that his sentiment is shared with agents throughout Canada's security services.

Sen. Kenny said the most glaring hole in Canadian airport security is related to airport support staff such as baggage handlers, caterers, mechanics, and airplane groomers. These workers, he said, undergo not-so-rigorous background checks only every five years, are subject to few searches, and their actions in restricted zones and on the tarmac are not monitored sufficiently.

Sen. Kenny said organized criminal gangs such as members of the Mafia, bikers, Chinese triads and others operate in "in every major airport in Canada." These gangs, he said, use the privileged access of corrupt ground crews to plant drugs in the baggage compartments of planes. It would be very easy, he said, for terrorists to pay smugglers—who ask few questions about what they're smuggling—to plant bombs on planes.

This is a very real threat, he said, because the plane destroyed in the 1985 Air India bombing had explosives planted in its luggage compartments.

"If a smuggler can do it, a terrorist can do it," Sen. Kenny said. "If we'd had been checking [ground crews], all those people would be alive today."

In addition, he said, almost no security or anti-smuggling measures are in place in the general aviation sections of airports, where private planes take off and land.

Sen. Kenny said that body scanners are more effective than our current scanning technology. He added, however, that these machines are not a panacea, and do are not able to view items stowed in body cavities.

During the early 1990s when airports were privatized, he said, the government devolved much authority over airport security to individual airport authorities, which he says have turned into "little kingdoms."

Before this devolution of authority, he said, the RCMP was responsible for security at all our major airports. These days, he said, individual airport authorities contract various police services and "rent a cops" to carry out security work.

Despite the 9/11 scare, he said, there are fewer police at Canadian airports than before. He referred to a 2003 Senate report, titled "The Myth of Security at Canada's airports," which showed the number of police officers at Toronto's Pearson International had declined from 290 in 1995, to 162 by 2003. During the same time, the report shows, passenger volume more than doubled.

"Ever since they've taken control they've been cutting back in the number of cops they've contracted for their facilities," he said.

Debbie Ciccotelli, the director of safety and security at the Greater Toronto Airports Authority, said the Toronto Pearson Airport is safe and secure.

Ms. Ciccotelli said that the number of police at that airport is "roughly equivalent" to when the RCMP was in charge of airport security. She also said the GTAA does not have the legislative authority to search baggage handlers and other crew.

Mathieu Larocque, a spokesman for CATSA, said his agency's mandate was "very limited."

Besides inspecting baggage and passengers, he said, CATSA is mandated to check the biometric ID cards of airport workers entering restricted zones, and conduct random searches of those workers.

CATSA was created in the wake of 9/11, he said, is in present in 89 airports in Canada. Mr. Laroque added that CATSA officials do not have authority to arrest people, and depend on the RCMP to do so.

Liberal transport critic Joe Volpe (Eglinton-Lawrence, Ont.) said that due to the prorogation the House Transport Committee was unable to address concerns about the body scanners, which were purchased through a sole-sourced contract.

"They spent \$11-million of Canadian taxpayers money," he said. "And we don't know whether (a) it was needed, (b) whether it works, and (c) whether it works as well as whatever else is out there."

Nor were Parliamentarians, he said, able to ask what influence the United States had in Canada's "knee jerk" adoption of body scanners.

"What did they propose? What did they instruct? What did they tell us to do? Were we doing it because aviation safety was a real issue in Canada, or are we doing it simply to mollify the Americans who hit the panic button once again?" Mr. Volpe asked.

The Liberal government of Paul Martin, he said, launched a Safety Management System for Canadian airports. This, he said, required aviation companies big and small to put in place self-monitoring systems, which would then be audited by Transport Canada to see if they satisfied the regulations.

While the government left the Safety Management System's self-monitoring requirements in place, he said, they have not been keeping up on the auditing side.

"They asked companies to set up their system, but they've taken away a lot of their auditors," he said. "We found they were at least 90 inspectors short as of last November, when officials last appeared before the committee."

Mr. Volpe said the government has failed to introduce a comprehensive aviation security policy since coming to office, nor a legislative framework to accompany it.

"I haven't heard the government come up with a plan," he said. "Instead of cherry picking here there and everywhere, let's be systematic and let's talk about a strategic approach to safety and security."

"It's one thing to start to cherry pick, it's another to have a methodical strategic approach to safety and security."

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