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## NATIONAL COMMISSION ON TERRORIST ATTACKS UPON THE UNITED STATES

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### **Second public hearing of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States**

### **Statement of Michael A. Canavan to the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States May 23, 2003**

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Vice Chairman, members of the Commission. Thank you for inviting me to speak before the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. I sincerely hope that my input will be useful in increasing the safety and security of our flying public.

My name is Mike Canavan. From December 2000 until October 2001, I served as the Associate Administrator for Civil Aviation Security at the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Upon joining FAA, my first order of business was to review our major mandates and policies and determine where immediate improvements to civil aviation security could be

### **Current News**

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The Commission has released its final report. [\[more\]](#)

The Chair and Vice Chair have released a statement regarding the Commission's closing. [\[more\]](#)

The Commission closed August 21, 2004. [\[more\]](#)

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*Chair*

Lee H. Hamilton  
*Vice Chair*

made, both short and long term. Since FAA was a regulatory agency and not an enforcement agency, I knew a challenge would lie ahead to work with the airline industry and those outside the federal government, making sure every effort was made to ensure the security of the flying public. The challenge would come in terms of developing and reconstructing this long-established partnership. Additionally, outside the FAA but within the federal government, I worked closely with my counterparts within the counterterrorism (CT) and intelligence communities. While FAA is considered part of the CT and intelligence communities, it participated only when issues arose that involved aviation-related matters.

It should be noted that FAA was a consumer of intelligence, not an intelligence collector. This is an important distinction as we relied completely on the Intelligence Community to provide the best quality of raw and analyzed intelligence so that, when appropriate, we were able to turn it into actionable intelligence from which we could then take corrective actions, through employing countermeasures, transmitting advisories, warnings, etc.

During my tenure at FAA, my staff and I interacted routinely with the intelligence and law enforcement communities. We were advised of current and possible future threats against civil aviation and worked actively to implement measures to protect the flying public against those threats. Throughout 2001, as the intelligence reporting volume increased, the overwhelming majority was focused on likely targets overseas, particularly in the Middle East. Throughout this period, my office issued at least 15 Information Circulars to authorized aviation industry security professionals- corporate security directors, senior management personnel, ground security coordinators, supervisory personnel at overseas locations and as appropriate, to local airline managers and law enforcement personnel on a need-to-know

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basis. Often times, these were issued in concert with Department of State public announcements and FBI National Law Enforcement Transmittals. Information Circulars contained data derived from law enforcement and intelligence information focusing on domestic and international terrorism threats directed against aviation. The Information Circulars updated U.S. carriers against continuing violence against American citizens and interests around the world, with a particular emphasis on the Middle East, and encouraged airlines to practice a high degree of awareness. For example, one Information Circular described the plot to target a public area in the Los Angeles Airport terminal by Ahmed Ressam- who was arrested in December 1999 while attempting to enter the United States from Canada. Another Information Circular issued in the summer 2001, updated airport security personnel of the development terrorists and criminals had made in disguising firearms.

Additionally, my organization within the FAA issued Security Directives which required the airlines and security organizations to implement modifications or upgrades to their current security posture based on a variety of factors, including changes in the threat environment.

### **THREAT ENVIRONMENT THROUGHOUT 2001**

As I recall, the threat reporting during early to mid-2001 centered on U.S. targets abroad. In June and July 2001, the FAA was included in many interagency Counterterrorism Security Group meetings, held at the White House by the National Security Council (NSC) staff, regarding possible attacks in the Arabian Peninsula, Israel, and Europe. In early July, the NSC chaired a meeting at which the interagency was briefed about additional intelligence indicating that terrorist attacks seemed imminent; the Intelligence Community briefers emphasized attacks would likely take place overseas. While

we all agreed that attacks within the U.S. would not be ruled out, there was no indication from the Intelligence Community that attacks focused specifically against airlines. Nonetheless, the entire CT community, including law enforcement and intelligence agencies, were placed on highest alert and we all sent out notifications for heightened security measures to be put in place immediately. The FAA sent out SD's and IC's to all interested parties.

During my 10 months at FAA, I was determined to instill a renewed sense of dedication and importance throughout the Civil Aviation Security organization, and the airline and airport industry that security of the flying public was our principal directive. A few examples include: traveling to every Category X airport - the largest volume domestic airports - and briefing all Civil Aviation Security, airline and airport staff regarding our renewed commitment to aviation security and traveling to several international airport locations to ensure that host nations understood the U.S. Government's commitment to civil aviation security. I also made it a priority to draft and obtain buy-in from all FAA Civil Aviation Security staff on a Strategic Plan that articulated our security mission from the present forward. Additionally, I directed my policy staff to develop a long-term strategy planning effort out to 2010 timeframe. In the short time I served at FAA, I firmly believe I began improving the state of FAA Civil Aviation Security.

### **SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR AVIATION SECURITY IMPROVEMENTS**

Of course it is one's hope to deter, disrupt or prevent every criminal or terrorist attack on the ground or in the skies. While this is the ultimate goal to which we all aspire, realistically this cannot happen as long as we continue to live in a free and open society. We must therefore strike a balance that allows a free and open society with sound and common sense

approaches to security. There are some aviation security programs that deserve attention and may provide improvements to the flying public. For example:

**RED TEAMS:** During my tenure at the FAA, I supported completely the concept of Red Teams, a program to test and evaluate the overall state of readiness of domestic and international airports. Although no airport security system can be flawless, in order to develop and implement improvements, it is necessary to work with, rather than to punish airport and airline personnel when defects are found, by developing an improvement plan together. Based on the Red Team findings, the airport authorities and airline industry should be made part of the improvement process rather than punished with fines and allowed to walk away without making the overall system better. This is another example why it is imperative that the airline industry never be allowed to transfer all of its security responsibilities to the federal government. This must always be a shared responsibility.

**Federal Air Marshals (FAM's):** The strength of this program's foundation is based on maintaining the anonymity of the FAM's. With the significant increase in FAM's deployed on domestic flights over the past 20 months, the FAM's are now as, or more likely, to be called upon to deal with unruly passengers as they are a threat to the cockpit crew and passengers. There is an important distinction between security of the aircraft, its crew and passengers versus a disorderly passenger; disclosing the FAM's identity undermines the very premise under which they are operating. This is another example where the airline industry should share responsibilities - by handling unruly passengers, the FAM's are allowed to execute their mission of providing security of the aircraft, its crew and passengers.

**Airline Industry Responsibilities:** Since

September 11, the federal government has taken additional responsibilities which had previously been air carriers and operators responsibilities for more than three decades. It seems there is little burden-sharing; the concept of "shared responsibility for good security" is a memory. The airport and airline personnel are the "first responders"; by virtue of their being the "eyes and ears on the ground", they will be immediately directly aware of questionable behavior and potential threats. Now, however, the airline industry is no longer responsible for screening passengers and is currently trying to relieve themselves of CAPPS and baggage screening, and are opposed to using hardened containers or advanced equipment. The airlines must be responsible for some measure of security throughout this process; the government cannot and should not be held accountable for all things aviation; the concept of common and shared responsibilities for security has been degraded severely in the past 20 months; it should be seriously revisited and the airline industry must become responsible again for some aspect of overall security.

**Aviation Security Abroad:** At international airports, foreign government and airlines hire the personnel responsible for screening in overseas locations. While we have made significant improvement domestically, we may not have yet dealt with the airports abroad. I understand that a recommendation was made to employ more than 70 explosive trace detection devices in airports overseas to screen footwear, after Richard Reid's failed attempt last year to explode an aircraft, has yet to be acted upon. This equipment is used domestically and we should improve our aviation security overseas for flights using the United States and elsewhere.

## **CONCLUSION**

When I joined FAA, I was impressed with many

of the dedicated employees at Headquarters and in the field. However, I recognized I would be facing a formidable challenge, working within the FAA structure and at the same time in an environment where "partnership with the industry" took on a whole new meaning. I tried to begin breaking new ground during this time.

Not a single day passes when I do not think about decisions, theories, and intelligence that might have possibly made some difference to the outcome of September 11, 2001. I hope that my testimony today and any information that I offer the National Commission will assist in making the traveling public and aviation in general more safe and secure. Thank you.

National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States  
The Commission closed on August 21, 2004. This site is archived.