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Trends. Aviation Security: Problems in Arguments Against Arming Pilots

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Title: Trends. Aviation Security: Problems in Arguments Against Arming Pilots

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Abstract: This Trends article discusses a press release from the Violence Policy center, which strongly advocates against arming commercial airline pilots against terrorists.

A press release from the Violence Policy Center most strongly advocates opposition to arming commercial airline pilots against terrorists and other security-related malefactors. Regardless of the ultimate validity of arming or not arming, the argumentative pose of the Center is problematic.

One argument against arming is that 21% of law enforcement officers who are killed with a handgun are shot with their own weapon. The problem with this argument is that the weapons-related scenarios of law enforcement and the projected ones of pilots are quite different as to distances and constrained space so as to defy the assumption of congruence and generalization.

Another argument is that law enforcement officers have only an 18% to 22% hit ratio in armed confrontations. Given that this ratio is often positively correlated with distance, the close quarters of the projected pilot scenario works to the pilots' advantage.

Still another argument is that 75% of law enforcement officers feloniously killed by suspects died within a 10-foot radius of the offender. But again, the scenarios and degree of enclosed space are often different between law enforcement officers and pilots. And as well "with rules of engagement limiting the pilot to weapons employment within the cockpit upon cockpit intrusion" the alternative is 100% felonious killings.

Finally, there is the argument about pilots not being able to concurrently fly and shoot, even if the pilots remain within the cockpit at all times. This argument pales before that of not being able to fly if dead.

Although the Center's argumentative pose has significant problems, the Center may still be correct in its opinion. In fact, it may well be that differences of opinion on arming pilots fall less on a dispassionate analysis with consequential criteria and more on the ideology and psychodynamics of everyday life. (See Conwell, Y., Duberstein, P. R., Connor, K., Eberly, S., Cox, C., & Caine, E. D. (2002). Access to firearms and risk for suicide in middle-aged and older adults. *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, 10, 407-416; Haider-Markel, D. P., & Joslyn, M. R. (2001). Gun policy, opinion, tragedy, and blame attribution: The conditional influence of Issue frames. *Journal of Politics*, 63, 520-543; Martin, C. A., Mainous III, A. G., Ford, H. H., Mainous, R., Slade, S., Martin, D., & Omar, H. (2001). Attitudes towards guns: Associations with alcohol use and impulsive behaviors. *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine & Health*, 13, 205-210; Violence Policy Center condemns Bush Administration Decision to Arm Pilots. (September 5, 2002). Press Release.) (Keywords: Aviation Safety, Aviation Security, Violence Policy Center.)