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# The Evaluation of Aviation Security and Security Incidents

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**Abstract.** This article describes several difficulties in evaluating the efficacy of aviation security policies, programs, strategies, and tactics.

Almost daily reading of general newspapers or specialized aviation newsletters yields graphic descriptions of aviation security incidents. These incidents usually are interpreted as depicting significant aviation security shortfalls, yet often these incidents illustrate no such thing.

In the context of catastrophic aviation security events, one might note that many of the incidents are non-catastrophic. Such incidents have included the violation of existing security procedures as opposed to acts that were part of a sequence that were going to lead to significantly endangering life and property. Examples include a screening machine becoming unplugged; an individual somehow passing through a checkpoint unscreened, leading to the evacuation of a terminal; finding a gun, ammunition, or a knife in carry-on or checked baggage; an individual making a joke about hijacking or aviation terrorism; smuggling oneself aboard a flight as cargo; or stowing away analogues of threatening materiel in aircraft lavatories. All, or virtually all, of such incidents were not going to lead to any significant security consequence—i.e., to anything against which security procedures have been put in place. In fact, one could argue that at least sophisticated terrorist operators would carefully study the publicly promulgated security incidents and try and ensure that they would or would not act similarly as appropriate to their terrorist designs.

In fact, many aviation security procedures have been put in place to show the public that something is being done from a security perspective. Other procedures are based on unsystematically acquired anecdotal data and idiosyncratic, even delusional reason and logic. Still other procedures are intended to be compatible with the strengths of security contractors as opposed to some legitimately validated security threat. One can certainly make the case that some security requirements—that when violated engender a security incident—actually may contraindicate aviation security even when compliance occurs.

In addition, aviation security incidents may reflect psychological and organizational conflict within or between security personnel. An example of the former case involves the overcompensation for feelings of inferiority that characterizes some security personnel and their choice of career and leads them to make an Issue of behaviors of questionable security relevance for reasons of showing their authority and control over the unfortunate of whom an example is being made. An example of the latter case involves representatives of one governmental organization who manifest a sense of entitlement so that they believe they do not have to abide by the security expectations of representatives of another organization or even act civilly towards the latter representatives—e.g., arguments between a commercial pilot and a secret service officer about the latter's right to board an aircraft regardless of the latter's behavior or the security posture of the moment.

Still another example of aviation security incidents having more to do with non-security Issues involves interpersonal situations wherein sexuality becomes an Issue. Whether it is body wandering or merely

## International Bulletin of Political Psychology

applying visual attention, the quantity and quality of security application may have more to do with sexual attraction or aversion or cultural expectations about appropriate and inappropriate behavior when dealing with an attractive or unattractive person than a legitimate security threat and risk.

Again, the close awareness and study of all of these incidents can be exploited by those with intentions to violate security. (See Galanti, G.-A. (2003). The Hispanic family and male-female relationships: An overview. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, 14, 180-185; Irvin, L. (2002). Ethics in organizations: A Chaos perspective. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 15, 359-381; McSwite, O. C. (1996). "Identity" and anxiety in the contemporary workplace. *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture & Society*, 1, 129-132; Penney, L. M., & Spector, P. E. (2002). Narcissism and counterproductive work behavior: Do bigger egos mean bigger problems? *International Journal of Selection & Assessment*, 10, 126-134.)

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