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TSA is missing the SPOT with Behavior Detection

Washington, DC – June 3, 2010. The Coalition of Airline Pilots Associations (CAPA) which represents over 28,000 pilots stated that the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has mass deployed its behavior detection program, called SPOT (screening of passengers by observation techniques), but once again has failed to equip the people who need it most. Airline Crewmembers, who are all too often the first responders to criminal activity in passenger and cargo aircraft, are not given this important training.

The Department of Homeland Security's own GAO report issued recently questions the effectiveness of this \$200 million dollar program. It is time that TSA recognizes that the real limitation of SPOT is that it is not in the hands of those who have the time and opportunity to effectively utilize the techniques.

It is reasonable to assume that someone intent on criminal activity onboard an aircraft will show recognizable signs of stress, hence the SPOT program. However, it is also reasonable to assume that these signs of stress will surely begin to increase the as the flight progresses closer and closer to the possible crime scene. This has been documented on several occasions, and is reinforced by the crewmembers who responded to Richard Reid, "the shoe bomber" and Umar Farouk, "the underwear bomber".

TSA BDOs (behavior detection officers) only have about 30 seconds to make a behavior diagnosis of passengers during the screening process. If trained properly, Airline Crewmembers might have several hours to ascertain if a possible threat exists. In fact, some of the specific behavioral patterns to look for are most effective if given time to develop. With time and opportunity, if a threat is identified, crewmembers could consult with each other, utilize any law enforcements assets onboard (such as Federal Air Marshals or Federal Flight Deck Officers), as well as request aid from experts on the ground. The best situation would be to identify the possible threat individual on the ground and address the situation before the aircraft becomes airborne.

If Umar Farouk was identified by crewmembers early in the flight as a possible risk, there could have been a real and tangible counterterrorism effort to mitigate the threat. Because those crewmembers were not trained in behavior recognition, they could not recognize what we now know were possible “indicators” presented by the terrorist.

The model already exists for crewmembers to be trained in these techniques. Currently, the Crewmember Self-Defense Training Program (CMSDT) is available in several locations throughout the United States. TSA employs distance-based training and contract instructors to teach this one-day defensive tactics course. Similarly, TSA could stand up a Crewmember Behavior Detection Program utilizing the same scheduling, training, and administration functionality.

We concur with the DHS’ GAO report which questions the effectiveness of SPOT, however, if put into the right hands, SPOT could be real layer of security for the flying public when and where we need it the most.

***-Paul Onorato
President***

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Director of Security***

The Coalition of Airline Pilots Associations (CAPA) is a trade association which represents more than 28,000 professional pilots at carriers including American Airlines, Southwest Airlines, UPS, ABX Air, US Airways, Atlas Air Cargo, Kalitta Air, Polar Air Cargo, Southern Air, and NetJets.

For more information, visit www.capapilots.org