

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE SAMUEL K. SKINNER, SECRETARY OF
TRANSPORTATION, BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND RELATED AGENCIES,
CONCERNING AVIATION SECURITY
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee: I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee today to describe the Department's efforts to combat terrorist threats against civil aviation.

As the recent destruction of Pan Am Flight 103 tragically reminds all of us, despite worldwide efforts to strengthen security, civil aviation continues to be a target for, and vulnerable to, criminal and terrorist acts. The international aviation community -- my Department, the State Department, foreign civil aviation authorities, the airlines and airports, law enforcement and intelligence agencies, and the dedicated men and women who are on the front lines screening passengers, checking baggage, and handling cargo -- has taken tremendous strides to make the system safe and secure. Yet, we can and must do more to thwart the cowardly and despicable acts of terrorists.

The challenge we face is a formidable one, for we live in a dynamic world where, as technology and political agendas change, so also do the threats against civil aviation. Where hijacking was once the preferred form of terrorist activity, today's terrorist has all too frequently turned to sabotage -- wantonly

aimed at the total destruction of aircraft and their precious human cargo. Through the 1970s and into the 1980s, concerted action by the world aviation community stemmed the hijacking menace: there were only two attempted hijackings of U.S.-registered aircraft last year; and the number of attempted hijackings of foreign airlines was half of what it was earlier in the decade.

In the past several years, though, the world has been witness to four horrific acts of sabotage: Air India Flight 182, TWA Flight 840, Korean Air Flight 858, and most recently Pan Am Flight 103. The primary lesson to be learned from these far flung and diverse acts of terrorism is that we must continue to build on the solid foundation of security measures built over the last decade and a half. We must continue to evolve strong yet flexible approaches that will bring our best technology, and our best people to bear on this problem. The process of reviewing, refining, and redirecting aviation security must be continuous.

A number of effective and responsible approaches are being pursued. They include:

- the Federal Air Marshal Program;
- effective passenger and baggage screening techniques;
- imposition of extraordinary security measures in special circumstances;

- worldwide use of x-ray and metal detecting equipment;
- in-depth assessments of U.S. and foreign airport security;
- tightened control of access to aircraft and security sensitive areas; and
- research and development of new security techniques and technologies;
- analysis of intelligence on terrorist activities;
- technical assistance and training.

Whenever necessary, we have sought additional resources to strengthen our security-related activities. This fiscal year, we are increasing the FAA's civil aviation security workforce by an additional 56 personnel, and have requested 120 more security positions in our FY 1990 budget, which will bring the total security force to almost 700. These additional employees will help significantly in responding to international threats and to continue to improve security here in the United States.

In addition to investing in human resources, we believe that continued investment in new technologies will reap great returns for aviation security. Mr. Chairman, yesterday you and I saw graphic evidence of the dramatic advances that are being made on this front when we toured the FAA Technical Center in Atlantic City.

We are accelerating the delivery schedule of the thermal neutron analysis (TNA) units we have ordered for explosives detection. This remarkable system is the result of three years of FAA-directed research on ways to detect all commercial and military explosives that might be concealed in checked baggage and air cargo, including otherwise hard to detect plastic explosives. Prototype TNA systems were tested at the Los Angeles and San Francisco Airports during June 1987-March 1988.

Six TNA units will be delivered and in operation during the June 1989 to January 1990 time frame, six months ahead of schedule. This equipment shows great promise for effectively screening passenger luggage. Our experience examining over 30,000 bags using thermal neutron analysis demonstrated that it could screen baggage with a high success rate (95 percent) and a low false alarm rate (4 percent). I should add that the high success rate was attained in finding minimal quantities of explosives, and would be even higher with larger amounts of explosive material. The first TNA system will be installed at JFK Airport in June.

Research is also underway on a vapor detection system for checking people for explosives. Last October at Boston Logan Airport, we tested a prototype walk-up explosive detection booth designed to detect the entire spectrum of explosives that may be carried by saboteurs. The false alarm rate was exceptionally low -- less than 1 percent -- but the time to screen each

passenger was about 30 seconds. The manufacturer is working now reducing that time frame to about 6 seconds per passenger and on increasing the sensitivity of the device. We hope to have the improved device available for testing late this year.

We also are continuing work to develop improved weapons detection capabilities, including efforts for the detection of plastic weapons, and are conducting an evaluation of state-of-the-art detection equipment now available commercially. Further, we continue to solicit new ideas from the scientific and academic communities with a view toward identifying and developing additional tools to enhance security.

Overall, in FY 1989 the FAA's R&D budget for these new technologies is \$8.6 million. In FY 1990 we have requested \$9.1 million, an amount that I believe is adequate to advance these programs at an expeditious pace.

While we continue to pursue these domestic initiatives, we are also working in the international arena to develop uniform approaches to combat terrorism in the skies. As you are aware, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) already has in place a set of security standards and recommended practices, incorporated into Annex 17 to the Chicago Convention. One hundred fifty-nine countries have acceded to that convention. We believe the measures set out in Annex 17 are fundamentally

sound, but, like our own security measures, they must periodically be reviewed and updated.

Last month, as one of my first official acts as Secretary of Transportation, I attended a Council Session of the International Civil Aviation Organization called specifically to address the sabotage of Pan Am Flight 103. Reflecting the seriousness with which such criminal acts are viewed, I was joined at that session by nine other ministers responsible for civil aviation as well as 23 additional countries' permanent ICAO representatives. I had the opportunity to speak with each of those ministers in the course of the two-day ICAO meeting and with many of the other senior government officials present, and can assure you that they are willing to join us to do all that is necessary to make international civil aviation secure from terrorist acts.

As a result of that meeting, the 33-member ICAO Council unanimously adopted a resolution setting out a plan of action that, I am confident, will lead to strengthened security procedures throughout the world. Specifically, as a matter of highest priority, ICAO will review existing international standards applicable to all operations to determine what changes are necessary in light of recent events. It will also consider developing a set of extraordinary measures to put in place when increased threat levels exist. Further, we agreed to expedite

research and development on detection of explosives and to explore the possibility of establishing an international regime for the marking of explosives. Over the coming weeks and months, we will be devoting a great deal of attention to ICAO and its security-related work.

Aviation security is a matter that concerns not just us public policy makers, but air travelers as well. The proposal has been made that the government should let the public have more information about the threats made against civil aviation so that prospective travelers can make their own judgments of the risks confronting them and decisions about when, where, and with whom to fly. This is a question we have devoted considerable thought to over the years.

My answer is this: any time we believe that general or specific threats to civil aviation cannot be effectively countered by the security measures available to us, our airlines, and our aviation partners, we take action. We are prepared to cancel endangered flights or discontinue service altogether to and from airports and countries where our citizens and airlines cannot be assured that risks will be kept to a minimum. We work with the State Department to assure that travel advisories are issued when and where justified. And, of course, we work with the intelligence agencies to obtain, evaluate, and act on information about threats against civil aviation. This is a

process that operates continuously, regardless of whether overt or specific threats have been received.

To flood air travelers with information on threats against civil aviation would seriously confuse everyone, and would not improve air safety, either system-wide or for individual travelers. In the United States alone there are, on average, between two and three threats made against aircraft or airports every day. The vast majority of these are anonymous threats that have no credibility; they are also threats that our security system is adequate to handle. If we add to this the numerous threats that are made against civil aviation around the world, publishing such information would wreak unnecessary havoc with the international civil aviation system. It would also increase the incentives for terrorists and other persons to make real or bogus threats, and, ultimately, would come to be largely ignored when travelers realize that virtually all anonymous threats and volunteered information are groundless.

Again, let me emphasize that when we believe an element of the civil aviation system cannot be adequately protected against a credible threat from someone or some organization with the clear intent and capability to carry out a criminal act, the U.S. Government will: 1) recommend that airlines cancel threatened services; and 2) if necessary, issue a public travel advisory to alert air travelers.

To make certain we know what all carriers serving the United States are doing to secure their operations against criminal and terrorist acts, I am announcing today my decision to amend Federal Aviation Regulation Part 129.25 to require foreign airlines to submit their security plans to the FAA for approval. We will use the standards and recommended practices contained in ICAO Annex 17 as the yardstick against which those plans will be measured. In taking this action, we will be better able to insure that the security precautions followed by foreign airlines serving the United States are adequate to meet the threats ascribed to those operations.

Finally, I would stress that our minds are open to new ideas on ways to improve aviation security. I have met with the heads of all of the major U.S.-flag international carriers to discuss this and other issues, and we have listened carefully to the proposals put forward by the Air Transport Association on the airlines' behalf. We have formed a special team in the Department to develop and evaluate a full range of concepts on how we and the rest of the international aviation community can make the skies safer and more secure. As that team pursues its work, if we find that the Department's existing programs need to be augmented, I will not hesitate to reprogram funds to make certain that we are able to carry out our important responsibilities.

We have made significant strides in designing and developing systems to protect the traveling public, but, as I stated at the outset, we must continue to improve. We must remain vigilant to counter new tactics and new equipment employed by terrorists. We look forward to the subcommittee's continued support as we explore new security concepts and advance the state-of-the-art in weapons and explosives detection.

That completes my prepared statement, Mr. Chairman. I would be pleased to respond to any questions you may have at this time.