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Editor: Because of CBRN implications, ASA is including this article, an opinion piece by the author. If any reader can constructively add to this discussion on how better to distinguish between the legitimate and fraudulent traveler - please join the discussion. The author, Elizabeth Evans Fryer, is a freelance science writer/ editor. She can be reached at: libbi@elizabeth-evansfryer.com

Passenger Profiling: Why Are We Waiting? by Elizabeth Evans Fryer

This article is based on a discussion in the Homeland Security group on LinkedIn.com, January through March 2010.

On Christmas Day 2009 a Nigerian man, a known Muslim extremist, attempted to detonate a bomb aboard an airplane bound for Detroit. The attack failed. On December 22, 2001, Richard Reid tried to detonate a shoe bomb on a plane bound for Miami in the US, his second try. Both would-be bombers highlight the importance of profiling air travelers, a strategy which has been discussed among experts in the field of transportation security, but which also has civil rights activists concerned.

“Profiling is the key, we just need to call it something else,” notes Seth Block, consultant/instructor at KTA Security. He offered the term “Terrorist Identification and Classification (TIC)”. [Editor's Note: For those of us in CBR defense and counter-terrorism, the term TIC means toxic industrial chemical.] The traveling public might be more receptive to undergoing TIC rather than profiling. It is more politically correct, it identifies the target, and no one should argue with a means to capture more terrorists. People will accept that it is something they have to put up with to ensure their safety while traveling.

Whatever we call it, most in the field of aviation security admit that profiling is necessary to ensure the safety of airline travelers. However, one opponent to passenger profiling makes this point: “It's not about keeping America

safe, it's about maintaining our current level of civilization with all its freedoms and rights in AvSec [aviation security] terms.” T. J. A. Campbell, aviation security consultant at Technical Training Resources in Boston, continues on to say, “For it is in creating chaos and limiting the freedoms of others that terrorists gain the power they crave.”

An interesting point, yet aviation security consultant Greg Glenn (not his real name because he is involved in the investigation of the Christmas bomber) argues that profiling does not necessarily upset the balance with freedoms and rights. He says that profiling can be effective without any personal identifiers and that a system that depends on sex, age, and nationality is fraught with holes anyway. “Appearance [other than ethnicity], behavior, baggage, accompanying persons [Is the individual traveling with family?], ticket details, passport details, travel documents, and many other objective indicators” are elements that can clue an experienced agent in to whether an individual is suspect. “Add in criteria such as stamps in the passport from problem countries or suspicious destinations in the itinerary and the process is yet more effective.”

An expert in identity protection, Bruce Monk, principal at Fraud-Free Identity Solutions, reminds us that profiling is the foundation for our credit system, the insurance/liability system, and many law enforcement activities. He says that the behavioral pattern associated with the Christmas bomber's trip has been known as a red flag for many years. And he emphasizes that it was a behavioral pattern; “no personal data or cultural information had to be collected or shared.”

The would-be bomber who boarded the Detroit-bound plane on Christmas day sent red flags up for most everyone (after the fact) except for those dealing directly with him:

- o Cash purchase of his ticket
- o No checked luggage-for an international flight
- o His itinerary-leaving from Nigeria, connecting in

Amsterdam, and continuing on to America

Aviation security is a national and international concern, but any regulations coming from the government or any international organization could take months, even years before implementation. Greg Glenn has a thoughtful take: "Maybe in the end, security will improve significantly when carriers decide to move away from the minimal requirements of regulatory agencies and appreciate the value of enhanced security and provide passenger-security training for ticketing agents on their own." (He even offers some convincing tag lines for the first airlines to make the move: "The secure carrier." "Your security is our concern.") Passengers may acquiesce more easily to spending hundreds of dollars to fly if they know that the airline they have chosen has taken steps beyond airport regulations to ensure that they have a safe flight.

Once trained agents cull suspicious travelers from the hoards, a trained "travel security" profiler can take over. Glenn says an experienced profiler, in a 90-second interview, can gain enough knowledge to make an informed decision about releasing or retaining the individual for further questioning. He thinks the millions of dollars spent on an automated system to analyze voice and facial twitches is a waste. "People are best at reading people."

Many consultants agree training is critical. According to T. Campbell, screeners often have only 3 weeks of training of which 8 hours are on X-ray examination and interpretation. They then are cast into the workplace and are expected to make judgment calls on containers of infinite variety and contents and to make that call in around 15 seconds. Compare that with several years training for radiologists, medical doctors trained in reading and interpreting X-rays, or even radiology technicians who do the screening. Developing curricula to offer a two-year certificate program and supplementing it with ongoing training would go a long way towards increasing air safety — as would increasing screener's pay to match responsibilities.

A nationwide search for jobs as a Transportation Security Officer (i.e., screener) returned positions that pay as little as \$14 an hour. Experts interviewed agree that most screeners are adept and dedicated to what they do, but a lot of responsibility is laid on these front-line screeners for such low pay.

Equipment, Data Mining and Profiling

Bruce Monk offers another innovative approach to terrorist profiling: data mining. Once personal linkages to the information are removed to protect privacy, travel data can be mined to build a model that differentiates the terrorist from everyday travelers. What is valuable in identifying passengers for a closer look, he says, are patterns in their behav-

ior and how they intersect with other patterns of behavior.

Stu Rodgers, director at AGS Analytics, agrees that done poorly, data mining can produce a lot of noise. Because human behavior is complex, he believes constructing a good initial model to guide the data mining will be difficult. "Difficult but not impossible," he emphasizes. An analyst working with security experts or other experts that understand the terrorist profile can build a useful model: a kind of roadmap for what types of information to combine, compare, and contrast in the search for suspicious behavior. This model would be tested and refined over time to return improved results.

Advanced scanning and screening technology is available, but because of costs and continual developments, not all airports will have the latest equipment. Plus, what is in place is used on just a small percentage of air travelers — screened randomly. We have all seen people who seem innocent being subject to more sensitive screening technology: the white-haired couple in their 70s, holding their arms out in a T as one agent hand-wands them and another rifles through their carry-ons, or an agent hand-wands the bare feet of a toddler in a stroller. Why were they singled out? More often than not, that decision is made on a random basis, says Glenn. Money would be better spent and resources better used if screening, rather than being random, were based on profile information.

Security provider Seth Block agrees that current screening procedures have done nothing more than cause delays and aggravation. He uses a meaningful metaphor to bring the situation into perspective. "When there is a fire, you put the wet stuff on the red stuff, not everywhere."

"There is no answer or one solution," Glenn concludes. "We must be creative, continue developing new methods, use various means of detection, and, most important, have a practical common-sense approach in the application. Profiling is an invaluable part of the overall aviation-security concept."

[Editor's Note: The use of chemical and radiological agents by passengers in airplanes has been made less likely because of some of the regulations in place. The screening equipment would note radiological materials almost immediately, whether in carry-ons or checked baggage. Liquid chemicals will be confined to checked baggage. Checked bags with liquids in them are regularly hand searched. Biological agents, as we have often noted in the ASA Newsletters, are the agents most easily carried on passengers and can easily be secreted on a person or in carry-on bags. The emotional state of a would-be terrorist is likely to raise red flags, especially one who knows he or she would be getting sick and suffering along with other passengers.]

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