

Ian Todd focuses on the changing face of the modern airport and how improvements in security can minimise terrorist attacks



THE EVOLUTION OF

AIRPORT SECURITY

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This year marks the 15th anniversary of a terrible attack that shook the world and prompted an ongoing quest to make air travel safer. Since 11 September 2001 the US has spent upwards of \$100 billion to secure airports and airplanes. Efforts to enhance airport security across the globe, however, are far from over.

On 9/11 there were fewer than 20,000 airport screeners on duty, many of them poorly trained, minimum-wage contract workers. This soon changed. Shortly after the attacks, the federal Government created

the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and, on 19 November 2001, Congress passed the Aviation and Transportation Security Act. This was matched with the introduction of similar changes to legislation in many countries across the world.

This saw the introduction of much tighter regulations for passenger screening and, among other measures, is why travellers are now asked to check-in several hours before their flight, to allow for thorough security checks.

It's hard to believe, but before 9/11 there was no

Ian Todd is Vice President of Restrata's Airports Division and is responsible for the delivery of a full suite of aviation security and operations services to airports, through a

cohesive system in place to vet passengers in advance of flying. In many areas, there was only limited technology in place to screen checked or carry-on baggage and most flights took off with minimal in-flight security. A major aim of the post-9/11 overhaul was to harness better intelligence and create more sophisticated pre-screening procedures to identify travellers that may warrant increased scrutiny.

The Lockerbie incident in 1988 led to the introduction of screening checks on luggage, however this was a voluntary process and on many flights, particularly domestic one, bags were transferred to aircraft without being checked for explosives. 2002 saw the widespread deployment of detection machines, one of the largest investments to date. The technology to screen people, however, has proved to be much more challenging. These transformational changes in the way people fly is reflective of what became a new reality on the ground and is something that is still being felt across the globe today.

Just recently, UK Prime Minister Theresa May used her first visit to the United Nations to call for a tightening in airport security around the world, a plea for all countries to match the extensive procedures and checks that are in place in the USA and most European countries. This drive for action on aviation security follows the downing of a Russian Metrojet flight from Sharm-el-Sheik in Egypt in October 2015 and the attacks at airports in Brussels and Istanbul earlier this year.

The resolution proposed by the UK PM demanded that all countries must ensure they have effective anti-terrorist measures in place through extra screening and security checks. Her call mirrored the feeling across the globe that a joined-up approach is needed to keep people safe and improve security across the board.

Over the past 15 years, major events have led to tighter checks, which have impinged on the passenger experience, creating delays, longer queues and disgruntled travellers. This is, we can all agree, a small price to pay to ensure the safety of people when flying.

The downing of the Russian airliner over Egypt last year was a distressing reminder that there is still much to be done to process increasing passenger numbers without negatively impacting upon the quality of security.

While no matter where you are in the world, passenger and baggage screening requirements are now broadly the same, the application of these requirements can vary greatly. The rise of extremist groups has seen new potential threats emerge in areas where previously there were none. In these areas there is a need for a much greater focus on screening standards than perhaps was the case before.

As the quality of checks prior to moving airside increase, so do the risk of attacks in less-secure landside areas of airports such as check-in lobbies, checkpoint entrances and arrivals areas, as the recent attacks in Brussels and Istanbul have shown.

There is no doubt that the effectiveness of technology will increase as will the successful detection of threats. However, in an industry that by its very nature is based on transferring and connecting people in different parts of

the world, the issue is that not all countries can afford the new technology and, in some instances, have neither the support nor the infrastructure to introduce it.

With almost eight million passengers flying every day, we cannot rely on technology alone to ensure the safety of travellers. It has its part to play, but is useless if staff are not well trained and equipped with the required skills and knowledge to safely and effectively screen passengers.

The shift in culture means that ever greater attention is being focused on each country's national training programme, which sets out the industry standards for instructors in aviation security. All airport staff must be cleared by the national authorities and must attend formal training appropriate to their position before they can start work.

There is also an International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) requirement for General Security Awareness Training, which states that every individual with an airside pass must receive appropriate training and be able to spot security breaches. These 'eyes and ears' across the airport are a vital part of the battle to implement effective security.

All countries are also required to have a national aviation security programme in place, which is regularly audited by ICAO. In addition to this, aviation organisations, companies and airports are all held to account by comprehensive and effective audit programmes. It's crucial that audits are frequent, random and well organised. The results of an audit programme, and the willingness to follow up where required, will always be very high on the list when establishing the effectiveness of a country's aviation security system.

Looking ahead, we can expect heightened airport security to continue to increase as technology becomes more advanced. The introduction of body scanners is just one example of the breakthroughs that have improved searches of passengers. They are far more effective than metal detectors and can check the body for a much wider range of items, in most cases using algorithms to identify likely threats.

Despite the headlines, it is worth remembering that even with the huge increase in the levels of international travel, attacks on airports over the past decade have been fairly limited. The terrorist attack on Brussels airport marked only the third against an aviation hub in the past decade. Indeed, statistics have shown that you are more at risk of getting into a car accident on the way to the airport than running into trouble when you get there.

While investment in passenger processing technology still ranks as the number one priority for airports, it has dropped from 73 percent in 2015 to 59 percent this year, as the focus has shifted to tightening airport security. Airports, governments, suppliers and other stakeholders are constantly working hard to strike the balance between operational efficiency and passenger experience, and maintaining the highest levels of safety and security. What is certain though, is that the airport security challenge will continue to evolve, and we will need to remain alert and flexible to stay ahead of the game.

A soldier patrols during the partial reopening of the departure hall of Brussels Airport in Zaventem

large team of highly experienced professionals. He served 21 years as a commissioned officer in the Royal Air Force, specialising in the delivery of security to UK airbases.