

STATEMENT OF BROCK ADAMS, SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION,
BEFORE THE AVIATION SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS AND TRANSPORTATION, CONCERNING
INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM, TUESDAY, JULY 18, 1979.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for inviting me to appear before you today on the subject of international terrorism. We in the Department of Transportation share your concern about the alarming increase in terrorist acts throughout the world and the increasing tendency to use terrorism to achieve political objectives. Clearly, there is a need to strengthen worldwide measures not only to condemn terrorism but to work toward its elimination from the political scene. We applaud the interest of this Subcommittee and your desire to build on the steps already taken by our government and governments elsewhere in the world to free all nations from this threat.

In November 1977, I appeared at a special meeting of the Council of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) in Montreal to point out the increasing severity of the threat of terrorism, to urge universal adoption of and adherence to the conventions on hijacking and aircraft sabotage and to emphasize to that group that we must have more stringent international standards

for the security of aviation. Terrorist incidents have continued to occur since that time, and they underscore far better than my words the need for prompt and effective action.

Transportation, and particularly aviation, has been a target for terrorist attack. Accordingly, the Department of Transportation has been actively involved in anti-air piracy efforts for many years and submits reports to the Congress on the effectiveness of the U.S. civil aviation security program. The most recent report noted that the worldwide increase in hijacking which began during the first half of 1977 continued during the last half of the year. There were 30 scheduled airline hijackings worldwide in 1977, of which 5 involved U.S. carriers. This is almost double the total for 1976 and more than any year since the 1968-72 peak. So far this year, there have been 14 hijackings--11 involving foreign airlines.

These figures, while providing the basis for concern, also point the way to an effective countermeasure. Of the 25 foreign air carrier hijackings in 1977, 21 occurred because of weaknesses in passenger screening procedures. Similarly, of the 11 foreign

hijackings in 1978, information available indicates that 6 were caused by ineffective passenger screening measures. In those incidents, the hijackers boarded the aircraft with their weapons through the normal boarding process. Effective passenger screening systems should have detected and intercepted those weapons. Eliminating the weaknesses in passenger screening systems should result in a significant reduction in the number of aircraft hijackings.

In contrast to the foreign experience, no U.S. hijacking since 1973 has involved real firearms or explosives passing undetected through passenger screening points. FAA regulations governing the security of air transportation currently cover 36 U.S. and 73 foreign airlines operating some 15,000 scheduled passenger flights each day to and from 620 U.S. and foreign airports and boarding some 585,000 passengers and 800,000 pieces of carry-on baggage daily. In spite of the complexities of this system and of the fact that the person or baggage we are looking for is literally one among millions, our security measures afford air travelers a level of security unmatched in any other type of travel. Our experience, as well as the experience of other nations who have adopted similar aggressive antihijacking programs, demonstrates the effectiveness of this system.

We have long recognized that universal application of effective passenger screening procedures greatly improves the security and safety of commercial air travel. Airline views on this point were recently expressed by Mr. Knute Hammarskjold, Director General of the International Air Transport Association, representing 109 of the world's major airlines. In June 2 messages to ICAO and to airline presidents and chief executives, Mr. Hammarskjold cited the May 20 attempted assault on passengers boarding an El Al flight at France's Orly Airport and its similarity to previous assaults of this nature at Athens (August 1973) and at Istanbul (August 1976). He called on the airlines to obtain commitments from their governments for effective screening or control of all passengers entering sterile departure areas. He noted that such actions by all nations would create a secure airport environment and would prevent the carriage of weapons in air transportation from one nation to another for the purpose of carrying out attacks at airports. In addition to improving overall air transport security, such measures could facilitate the flow of intransit and transfer passengers and reduce the costs of processing such passengers at many airports.

The commitment of the U.S. government to effective passenger screening is firm. Our procedures have been in effect for more than five years and are fully consistent with the IATA recommendations. We applaud Mr. Hammarskjold and the airlines for their continuing efforts in seeking improvements in the effectiveness of international civil aviation security. We also applaud the vigorous efforts by airline pilots and their organizations to promote a safe and secure flying environment.

The U.S. has been a leader both in ICAO and in the United Nations in seeking international action to improve aviation security. Both organizations have, for a number of years, addressed themselves to the problem. However, while a number of positive results have been achieved, until last year the progress has been slow. During this past year, the United Nation's General Assembly adopted a Resolution Condemning Acts of Unlawful Interference with Civil Aviation. ICAO, too, adopted resolutions urging member states to implement specific antihijacking measures including the screening of passengers and cabin baggage on all flights. We welcome these efforts.

In 1974, ICAO incorporated a number of Standards and Recommended Practices for Security in Annex 17 of the Convention

on International Civil Aviation, known as the Chicago Convention. The U.S. and other like-minded nations believe that these Standards are not sufficiently stringent to assure an acceptable level of international aviation security, and a series of amendments to Annex 17 has been proposed. The proposals, which the ICAO Council submitted to member states for comment in May of this year, include the strengthening of two current Standards (which are essentially required actions), adoption of five new Recommended Practices (which are essentially discretionary actions), and the elevation of six current Recommended Practices to the level of Standards. Although the amendments fall short of the stringency the U.S. would have liked, they nevertheless represent very substantial improvements and the U.S. will work for their early adoption.

Of course, many, if not most, nations and airlines of the world now have active civil aviation security programs and are making significant improvements in the security of their air transportation systems. The U.S. has endeavored to speed these improvements by providing technical assistance, guidance and motivation for those countries with limited experience in this field.

We try to assure that interested nations have access to our knowledge and our expertise in security matters. FAA technical assistance teams have already visited 26 countries to provide advice and assistance in developing or improving their civil aviation security programs. Over 200 foreign officials and technicians have attended the aviation security training school at our Transportation Safety Institute in Oklahoma City. We have given in-depth briefings on all aspects of aviation security and made available training materials to foreign governments and airlines. For the most part, the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration has provided the funds necessary to support these efforts.

We regularly conduct security inspections of U.S. flag carrier and certain foreign carrier facilities outside the U.S. This involves visits to most of the major foreign airports. The purpose of these inspections is to assure that the airlines are in compliance with our Federal Aviation Regulations. During the course of the inspections, our representatives meet with foreign airport security officials and any airport security weaknesses or deficiencies observed are called to their attention. This inspection activity has produced security improvements at many foreign airports and has

helped to assure the continuing effectiveness of airline security measures required by Federal Aviation Regulations.

Turning now to the legislation before this Subcommittee, Mr. Chairman, we strongly endorse the objectives of H.R. 13261 to improve the protection of U.S. citizens using commercial air service. We particularly urge that the provisions of Section 10 that would implement the Montreal Sabotage Convention be enacted at the earliest possible time. Section 11 of the bill would provide additional measures for prosecution and extradition that will strengthen existing deterrence for persons who would commit crimes affecting the security of air transportation. We also urge adoption of this section.

Section 8 of the bill would require an extension to charter operations of the security measures currently applicable to scheduled passenger operations. I am pleased to report that regulations have already been revised to this effect and screening of public charter flights will be required beginning July 25.

Section 6 is the section most pertinent to the Department of Transportation. It would require that assessments be conducted of certain foreign airports to determine the extent to which they

effectively maintain and administer security measures. If it is determined by the Secretary of Transportation that an airport does not maintain effective security measures, the responsible government would be notified and corrective actions recommended. If corrective action were not taken within 180 days, the identity of the airport would be published in the Federal Register and prominently posted at U.S. air carrier airports. Further, consideration would be given to the imposition of certain measures against air carrier operations to or from that airport. We have examined this section carefully and believe it to be a reasonable, balanced approach to a most difficult problem.

Section 7 authorizes the Secretary to promote international aviation security by providing technical assistance to foreign states. As I indicated earlier, we have had for several years a limited program of assistance to foreign governments, funded primarily by LEAA. We welcome this authorization as it will enable us to continue this important and worthwhile program more effectively.

In my judgment, the best way to achieve lasting improvements in aviation security is through the multilateral efforts of all concerned nations, working together through ICAO, a recognized international, safety oriented, organization. Further, the work of

ICAO should continue to be supplemented through bilateral efforts of those nations, including the U.S., that have led in the development and implementation of effective aviation security programs.

It must be made clear, nonetheless, that the U.S. is prepared to take unilateral action, including the imposition of sanctions, if necessary to protect U.S. citizens. The provisions of H.R. 13261 place the nations of the world on notice of our resolve to counteract terrorist acts, and provide some of the tools necessary to do so. At the same time, this legislation would provide the mechanism for an active U.S. program of helping other countries to upgrade airport security and sharing with them our expertise and experience. This legislation adopts a firm policy toward countries whose airports do not have effective security, but it also provides for giving to those countries help they may need to make necessary improvements and to achieve an acceptable level of security.

That concludes my statement, Mr. Chairman. I will be pleased to respond to questions you may have on this subject.