

**STATEMENT BY RAFI RON
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TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM**

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Transportation Security: Are Our Airports Safe?

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. First, let me thank the Committee for inviting me to testify concerning airport security. I am Rafi Ron, President of New Age Security Solutions (NASS), a transportation security consulting firm based in Dulles, VA.

Prior to founding NASS, I served as Director of Security at Tel-Aviv Ben-Gurion International Airport for a period of five years. My experience includes more than 40 years in the field of security, intelligence, and counterterrorism. It is also my please to say that last year I became an American citizen.

Media reports in recent years have drawn attention to the security lapses that still exist in our airport security system. While much of the focus has been on passenger screening and security, passengers only represent a fraction of the risk we face. Little progress has been made securing the far larger portion of the airport where passengers do not have access. These challenges include:

1. Keeping intruders from breaching restricted areas of the airport, including parked aircrafts, the ramps and various locations of materials loaded later on aircrafts.
2. Protecting the public areas of terminals from potential bombers and “active shooters” and other types of ground attacks.
3. Preventing airport insiders from using their special access to restricted areas to help misguided individuals or terrorist cells, carry out illegal and destructive plans.

The common denominator in all of these challenges is that none of them relate directly to passengers. These risks are all within the “Airport facility security” domain, and outside the passenger and baggage screening protocols. This is not surprising in light of the fact that since 9/11 we have invested billions of dollars to screen passengers and bags but we have implemented very few and relatively inconsistent initiatives to improve ground security operations that would addresses the challenges reported by the media and other security lapses that are not publicly reported.

When setting a goal of protecting the aviation system, we cannot overlook the critical role of ensuring that each airport facility must stand as a security island, aware of risks in real-time, trained to respond quickly and equipped to thwart the higher levels of risk. Unfortunately, in our National Aviation Security strategy, intrusion prevention into restricted areas and other ground security vulnerabilities have become a lower priority. Consequently, we have seen relatively

uncontrolled access to parked or taxiing aircrafts. This has resulted in unauthorized vehicles on runways and taxiway as well as multiple examples of “stowaways” in the landing gear compartment of aircraft. One can only imagine the consequences if instead of 120 pound stowaway, an undetected intruder had left a two pound explosive device. Perimeter security is just as critical to aviation security as passenger and bag screening.

“The insider threat” to our aviation system is just as dangerous as the terrorist passenger but much more difficult to address because it comes from those who are already trusted inside the system. While inside criminal activity inside the US aviation system has not yet been directed at taking down airplanes, the perpetrators have demonstrated a willingness to defy the law and put others at risk. Although most aviation employees are honorable, hardworking Americans, recent reports indicate serious problems that range from firearm and drug to baggage thefts and inappropriate passenger contact. What is particularly troublesome is that the crimes are rarely the actions of an isolated individual. Networks of employees are flaunting the law and bypassing security for their personal motives. Such individuals are very susceptible to terrorist influences or inadvertently delivering explosive devices under pretext of “harmless substances” smuggling. As a result of the Atlanta weapon smuggling case, TSA is increasing background checks and the frequency for revalidating the clearances as well as random employee screening. These measures are important, but do not eradicate parallel breaches in the system.

Public area security is another vulnerability as we saw in the attack against TSA’s agents at LAX in 2013 and the planned car bombs during the “Millennium Plot”. Airports are not prepared for these scenarios despite the fact that they can be anticipated. Keep in mind that the same terrorists that have targeted the US aviation system, have repeatedly used car bombs, suicide bombers, and coordinated assaults against secure installations in other parts of the world.

An analysis of these diverse scenarios, demonstrates two main factors that contribute to our increased vulnerabilities:

- a. There is no clear structure for responsibility, authority and accountability at most airports.
- b. Even with the best of intentions, airport policing is not designed or implemented to meet the terrorist threats. They lack the officers, training, and equipment needed to anticipate and stop terrorist activities. For the most part, they are organized to deploy reactively rather than proactively.

The existing federal, state, and local structure presents two main problems:

TSA was established to take over passenger and bag screening. Previously the government regulated aviation security broadly through the Federal Aviation Administration. The FAA also provided grants and loans to help local jurisdictions enhance their facilities. Since screening was TSA’s main responsibility, the federal government’s role as a regulator for other aviation security activities was reduced in comparison. Even when TSA took on the Air Marshal program it was through executive implementation. So two of the main areas of aviation security became

federal self-regulating and issues like airport employee vetting, perimeter hardening, and local patrols became secondary.

This change in priorities led to the creation of a highly detailed screening operation, elevating the quality of screening substantially and consuming the largest part of the agency's budget. At the same time we see relatively little development in producing and enforcing new, higher standards in areas that are not the direct responsibility of TSA.

Perimeter security provides a good example of this problem. While passenger screening has increased, with comparably large budgets to support it, perimeter security standards did not change much after 2001 and there is little federal budget support. The responsibility for executing perimeter security falls under the local airport authority. The lack of local government resources makes it difficult for TSA to issue and enforce higher standards to meet new challenges. TSA issues warning letters to airports with perimeter security breaches, but that has not proved to be very effective.

Good perimeter security is based on a combination of effective detection and surveillance technology, skilled manpower to assess alarms, and the ability to dispatch officers to prevent an intruder's access. At most airports, the technological systems are initiated and designed by an engineering department with little or no police involvement. The control center is operated by an airport operation department with limited security orientation. Patrols are typically provided by the airport police that in many cases operates under a system that places a higher priority on issuing traffic tickets. The result is that perimeter detection technology is not properly budgeted and designed, security control centers are not properly manned, and the airport police have limited presence on the perimeter even when an alarm sounds. No local, state or federal department feels responsible for the final result and in the absence of clear higher standards, we end up with very few airports actually installing and operating perimeter intrusion detection systems and running an effective perimeter protection.

This relates directly to the second major issue in the airport facility security operation. The traditional role of police departments is responsive. Legally and practically, this is the standard in law enforcement; the commission of a crime initiates action. When it comes to counter-terrorism, the goal is prevention because while a criminal rarely affects many people and wants to escape to have another chance, a terrorist doesn't. The paradigm is different because a terrorist wants to affect as many people as possible and is often willing to act without regard for their own life. By the time the event takes place, they have reached their objective. Response time is more a factor in treating the wounded than apprehending a perpetrator. Many airport police forces have not recognized the need to shift to a new mindset and strategy. Their mission, organizational structure, manpower profile, training, communications, and weapons in many cases have not changed after 9/11. This is not a negative reflection on them, as they are often simply performing as they would in any other urban setting. But aviation security calls for different standards, with specialized training and a proactive orientation.

A good airport security system is based on systems that comprehensively prevent intrusion, instantaneously detect a breach and provide the ability to quickly reach any location on the airport. To be effective, it must function more like a security and protection team safeguarding a national security asset rather than traditional law enforcement patrols that may not need to visit a neighborhood for days. Airport police must be able to focus on the unique mission of an airport security force. Officers must be familiar with all the various possible terrorists Modus Operandi against their specific Airport. Manpower should be selected according to their ability to meet performance standards. And those standards should be created and guided by the reality that an airport is an integral part of our national security. Airport police officers should periodically be trained and certified at national centers that evaluate skills and fitness. They would benefit from exposure to national intelligence gathering and investigative capabilities focused on terrorist activities that jeopardize airport security.

Summary

In order to balance our aviation security system, we must reinforce the airport facility component. This can be achieved by having a clear and comprehensive regulatory environment that helps local airports prepare, train, and equip personnel as well as provide financial incentives to construct effective perimeter security systems. Prior to 9/11 that responsibility was within the FAA. After 2001, some of it was transferred to TSA. Some of it fell on the resources of local government. And some of it has been neglected. I urge Congress to take steps that would:

1. Create a clear structure of responsibility that extends from the national level to the “boots on the ground” level, including a predetermined local command structure for security emergencies. Identify airport police as the entity in charge of all aspects of facility security including planning, implementation, and regulation enforcement. And help them gain the tools to accomplish that goal by creation of a national training and certification program.
2. Create and enforce consistent standards for ground security measures, including perimeter detection systems that would balance the level of security with the programs implemented for screening and checking the background of aviation employees.
3. Select a federal entity that will develop standards for airport police forces nationwide that recognize their unique needs in the areas of mission statements, force building, organizational structure, strategy and tactics, weapon and other equipment, training, and intelligence.
4. Prioritize federal funding to enable resources to be allocated to local jurisdictions responsible for airport facility security.

Thank you for your attention, I will be happy to answer questions.