



Content details for Sky Marshal training courses are understandably limited.

On-Board Flight Security

Much has been written and said, over the last couple of years about the prospect of the, so-called Sky Marshals.

Most people will know that these will most likely be armed and trained, security personnel placed strategically on board for the express purpose of intervening in a hostile situation to suppress and to constrain any individuals threatening the safety of aircraft, its passengers and crew.

In what form will these Air Marshals appear to us? Will they have identifiable uniforms? Will they be carrying concealed or unconcealed arms? "Fire-Arms" or "Blunt Instruments"? The questions are many. "What about human rights?" some will ask.

It is clear that such on board measures are rather drastic but it seems that we can no longer depend entirely on pre-flight preventive precautions.

So where are we now. As we would expect, particularly since the events of September 2001, there has been much discussion and even some action taken to tackle the complex issue of air piracy. Secure flight doors being one high profile positive action.

The deployment of in-flight security personnel cannot and must not be considered as a substitute for effective ground security. To have proper security in place demands an emphasis on the first line of defence, namely preflight ground security measures. Sky Marshals should be seen as the last element for preventing a catastrophic security/safety breach, after all other safeguards have failed.

Another aspect of the deployment of in-flight Sky Marshals is the recognition that there is a significant difference between law enforcement officers performing their duties on the ground and aboard aircraft.

For this reason, the responsibility for the employment, training, qualification and deployment of armed

security personnel should always rest with the respective State authorities and airlines.

Similarly, both must be responsible for the development of mutually safe and effective procedures to be used. Such a protocol must also provide a clear recognition that the Pilot-in Command must retain the ultimate authority for the orderly conduct of the flight and the established chain of command.

The protocol needs to address the optimum positioning of seat assignment and effective, discrete identification and communication between the Sky Marshals, Captain and other designated crew members. The rules of engagement and tactics to be utilized in the case of an intervention should be included in any pre-flight briefing.

The protocol also needs to provide for the installation and use of an appropriate means of monitoring the cabin(s) from the flight deck with ideally, also a radio audio video link to the appropriate ground control.

If lethal weapons are to be carried on board, (and this is probably happening at times now), the safety of the flight must always remain the primary concern. Weapons and ammunition should be selected with flight safety in mind. Measures to prevent the misuse of such arms through new technologies on the market must be included.

It follows that regular flight crews should not be armed and the Sky Marshals should not be called to subdue or arrest unruly passengers unless, perhaps, hidden weapons are revealed and may be used.

There are many other issues to be resolved. For instance, what procedures should be adopted for flights having a mix of domestic and international stops? Changes of flight crews or Sky Marshals on long flights would mean new briefings.

The International Civil Aviation Organisation in their Annex 17, Standard 4.6.5, addresses the international obligation for member States to allow the travel of armed personnel on board aircraft operated by the requesting State. However, only after agreement by all affected States can such travel be allowed. At the moment, some 60 States have established or announced intentions to set up an In-flight Security Programme.

Only through cooperation among all the affected parties, including fare-paying passengers, can our security be enhanced. Unilateral action on the part of any single government would be counterproductive.

Chris Maybury
With acknowledgements to:
International Civil Aviation Organisation Journal
International Federation of Airline Pilots

Aviation Group News

Roger Smith, the previous Aviation SIG Chairman has now left Saudi Arabia. Ian Crawford from BAE Systems has "assumed the position" until after the May AGM and a successor can be appointed.