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November 8, 2002

Honorable Bob Smith
307 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Smith,

On behalf of all airline crewmembers and passengers, the Airline Pilots' Security Alliance thanks you for your tireless support of better airline security. In light of recent, largely unknown events, we seek your help once again.

A recent increase in the threat level against our airliners has come to the attention of APSA. We have both observed and been briefed by Federal Air Marshals on incidents occurring on and around our aircraft, nationwide, evidently with increasing frequency. These incidents involve groups of men, believed to be Muslims of middle Eastern, Russian or Chechen descent, who are engaging in threatening behavior in attempts to flesh out Federal Air Marshals (FAM) or other Law Enforcement Officers who may be on board. Some FAMs believe these incidents are attempts to judge how secure our airliners are in preparation for another series of hijackings.

These individuals are engaging in a number of different activities, some of which are being repeated by more than one group. This leads APSA to the inevitable conclusion that these acts are coordinated. These acts include:

- A group of males who know each other board a lightly loaded airliner then disperse on board, sitting far from each other. They spend the flight cycling through the lavatories, taking up to 10 minutes each, emerging and giving each other hand signals. This scenario has been observed numerous times. Crewmembers who have seen this universally describe it as a deliberate attempt to act suspiciously and draw attention.
- One or two males standing up mid-cabin, then running toward the cockpit door, stopping just short and turning around to see if anyone is reacting.
- A well-dressed male entering the First Class lavatory, emerging wearing combat fatigues.
- Persons using the First Class lavatory, but "trying" the knob on the cockpit door first. This is a recent development, indicating that their actions are moving closer and closer to the cockpit.
- Timing the opening of the cockpit door and drawing the details of the door while it is open.

- Standing up in unison whenever the cockpit door is opened in obvious attempts to elicit reactions from any law enforcement personnel who may be aboard.
- Brushing up against FAMs in the boarding area, in what one FAM described as attempts to discover where they carry their weapons. (FAMs can sometimes be picked out of a crowd by close observation).
- Photographing FAMs as they move about the airport outside the secure area.
- An APSA Trustee recently had two FAMs on his flight that briefed him, saying that although there was no threat to the aircraft, they were there to watch two passengers aboard who they suspected were conducting terrorist intelligence operations.

Crewmembers are increasingly reporting and becoming aware of these events, indicating they are happening more often. However, APSA is disturbed that to the best of our knowledge, occurrence of these events is not even being related to flight crews by either airline managements or the TSA. Considering that Administration-disarmed and defenseless flight crews are the second-to-last line of defense (the last line is an Administration US tactical aircraft, ready to shoot down American citizens) APSA asks why these front-line employees are not being provided even the information needed to do their jobs, much less a way to defend control of their airplanes.

Supporting the observation of these numerous events is intelligence information as well as recent events. Additionally, Deputy Undersecretary of Transportation Stephen McHale told APSA months ago, "The clock is ticking...we are on borrowed time for more hijackings." And DOT Secretary Mineta said at the Senate Hearing this summer that he sees the intelligence reports every day and "the threat to our airlines is still very real." Also, last month the FBI issued a new alert for terrorist hijackings using non-Arabic Muslims.

A group of suspected terrorists arrested recently in Detroit worked at the Detroit Metropolitan Airport and were tasked with identifying security weaknesses there. According to intelligence sources, Al Qaida terrorists have trained to conduct surveillance at airports and *on board* our airliners. They are trained to assess new security procedures and *fly as passengers* to gather intelligence. They have applied for employment at airports and have tried to bribe airport employees. Clearly this level of effort is not for naught.

Further intelligence reveals that terrorists have trained to hide homemade bombs, some of which may now be different than what we generally look for. (The EDT "bomb sniffers" used at airport screening checkpoints are employed to examine carry-on bags but not people who can carry explosives on their persons.) According to TSA screeners, persons wearing religious head coverings—no matter how bulky—are NOT required to remove them at security

checkpoints unless a hand-wand examination indicates *metal* underneath. Explosive materials are not metallic and can therefore easily be concealed under these garments. So can *lethal* non-metallic weapons, such as razor-sharp Plexiglas knives that can be used to control a cabin prior to a cockpit breach.

After reviewing airline economic data and consulting with a well-known crime statistician, APSA believes that any further terrorist hijackings, in addition to the loss of life, would wreak economic disaster on our airlines and cripple our air transportation system. This economic damage would spill over onto the rest of our already brittle economy. And the damage to American morale would be incalculable. With so much at stake, and given the increasingly clear indications that airliners are still terrorist targets, it becomes morally imperative that pilots be able to defend their cockpits with lethal force as universally recommended by law enforcement.

APSA will remain in the vanguard to secure our skies and thanks you for your tireless support of real airline security.

Respectfully yours,

Captain Scott R. Lewis
Director
Airline Pilots' Security Alliance