

## Epilogue

The recommendations in this volume address current threats to aviation security, but those threats are constantly evolving. Additional security measures not contemplated by these recommendations may be required in future. An incident that occurred after this volume was completed illustrates this.

On December 25, 2009, a Northwest Airlines aircraft en route from Amsterdam to Detroit narrowly escaped disaster when a passenger failed in his attempt to detonate explosives. He had managed to board in Amsterdam with the explosives hidden in his underwear. He apparently tried to detonate the explosives as the aircraft approached Detroit. A small fire resulted, but there was no explosion. Other passengers and the crew subdued him and the aircraft landed safely.

US President Barack Obama immediately ordered an inquiry. The inquiry report revealed significant security failures:

...[T]he US government had the information – scattered throughout the system – to potentially uncover this plot and disrupt the attack. Rather than a failure to collect or share intelligence, this was a failure to connect and understand the intelligence that we already had.<sup>2433</sup>

The Government of Canada responded to the Northwest Airlines incident. In a January 5, 2010, news release the Government announced that it would introduce full body scanners at major Canadian airports as a voluntary screening alternative for passengers who did not want to undergo a physical search.<sup>2434</sup> The body scanner is said to enhance the ability to detect articles hidden under clothing. The release stated that the Government would soon issue a “request for proposal” for passenger-behaviour observation in screening at major Canadian airports.

The news release did not discuss the central issue in the December 25 incident: the failure of the US government to process the intelligence it held about the passenger that might have led to his apprehension before he boarded the aircraft.

The Northwest Airlines incident illustrates the point, made in Volume One, that terrorist threats are constantly evolving and so require flexibility in security measures. Attempts by suicidal passengers to destroy aircraft have occurred

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<sup>2433</sup> The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, Remarks by the President on Strengthening Intelligence and Aviation Security, January 7, 2010: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-strengthening-intelligence-and-aviation-security>.

<sup>2434</sup> Transport Canada, News Release, “Government of Canada invests in full body scanners and behaviour screening to further enhance security at Canadian airports”: <http://www.tc.gc.ca/eng/mediaroom/releases-2010-h002e-5794.htm>.

before, but the method used in this incident to hide explosives was new. The changing threat environment highlights the importance of a multi-layered approach to security so that an individual who evades detection by one layer can be caught by another. Unfortunately, this incident also shows that, even with a multi-layered approach, absolute security is almost impossible to achieve. Imperfect application of layers of security – such as inadequate intelligence-sharing and analysis, or passenger screening – can combine to create dangerous vulnerabilities. It was mere good fortune that the explosive device carried by the Northwest Airlines passenger did not detonate with tragic consequences.

