

# Is it Safe to Fly?

by Jerry Gordon with Amb. R. James Woolsey and Lisa Benson (December 2015)



Saturday morning, October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015 Flight 9268 a Metrojet Airbus A321 with 224 largely Russian tourists, and crew aboard was on a course for St. Petersburg from Sharm el-Sheikh on Egypt's Sinai Red Sea. The aircraft reached an altitude of 31,000 feet at 430 knots, when something catastrophic occurred at 23 minutes into the flight. Communications with the pilot abruptly ended, the plane struggled to gain altitude and just as suddenly plummeted earthward with the tail section broken off and the rest of fuselage sent crashing into the desert and mountains. A flash was seen via satellite. All 224 passengers and crew aboard were killed. The crash occurred less than 300 miles from the resort area at the tip of the Sinai Peninsula at the mouth of the Red Sea. The passenger remains and aircraft debris were scattered over a wide area. All of this was recorded in real time on satellite flight status internet reports and satellite imagery. Forensic teams from Egyptian, Russian and Airbus air safety organizations were dispatched to retrieve the flight data recorders. Egyptian military and Red Crescent teams were engaged in recovery of the remains, personal effects and luggage of those killed in the crash. Grief was overwhelming at funerals held in St. Petersburg, Russia following the arrival of the remains of the victims.



## **Alleged ISIS soda can bomb with detonator and switch**

**Source *Dabig Magazine***

The immediate questions were what caused the aviation catastrophe and who may have been behind it. The forensic evidence after review of black box recordings [pointed](#) to a bomb planted in the rear baggage hold by a possible ISIS operative. A picture of a popular Schweppes soda can consumed in Egypt with a detonator and timer appeared in the ISIS monthly magazine, *Dabig*. *CNN* [reported](#) comments from former Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms expert, Anthony May indicating the improvised explosive device was capable of bringing down Metrojet Flight 9268:

The photograph showed a soft drink can and two components that appear to be a detonator and a switch, explosives expert Anthony May said.

There is a hole in the bottom of the can, which reveals a white substance inside that could be explosives, he said. The detonator would be placed through the hole.

The three components appeared to constitute a “suicide-type bomb” because the bomber would have to flip the single-throw rocker switch to detonate the bomb, May said.

May acknowledged the apparent simplicity and lethality of the bomb.

“It doesn’t take much to bring down a plane in flight if it’s placed in the most critical area of the aircraft, breaking the fuselage,” said May, a retired explosives enforcement officer with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

Because the can is made of metal, “any typical security protocol should detect this via the metal detectors or via the x-rays” in an airport, May said.

“However, it’s not unlikely or impossible to separate these components, and an individual could carry separate components through security and then assemble the device on the other side,” May said.

May also cited another, “most likely” scenario for moving such a bomb through an airport: “An insider threat getting this item, circumventing security, getting it to the aircraft – if it was used on the aircraft,” May said.

The downing of the Russian airliner was done in retaliation for Russia’s airstrikes in Syria, ISIS claimed in the magazine.

### **Radicalization of French Muslim Airport Workers and Lack of Screening**

The likelihood that poor security screenings of airport ground and tarmac personnel harboring ISIS sympathies was revealed following terrorist attacks in Paris. On November 13<sup>th</sup> ISIS trained Belgian and French born operatives in Paris equipped with Kalashnikov assault rifles and grenades killed 130 innocent

civilians, injuring more than 352, 99 seriously. They perpetrated suicide bombings at a French soccer stadium, random shootings of patrons at outdoor cafes, and hostages held at a concert hall. France and the world were devastated by this ISIS attack. French President Hollande called it “an act of war” by the self-declared Islamic State. The alleged mastermind of the ISIS massacres was subsequently killed along with a female cousin and a third unidentified suspect in a massive shootout by French police who assaulted a safe house on November 18<sup>th</sup> in the predominately Muslim suburb of St. Denis, north of Paris. French President Hollande and President Obama at a White House Press Conference on November 23<sup>rd</sup> declared their solidarity endeavoring to destroy ISIS. However, French and Belgian counterterrorism authorities have raised the issue of whether Muslim airport ground and tarmac personnel are radicalized. *CNN* [reported](#) on November 27, 2015 that French intelligence were concerned about radicalization of airport workers as early as 2004, noting:

French intelligence services were concerned as early as 2004 about the radicalization of many airport workers at Paris’ Charles de Gaulle Airport, according to a confidential document from the French Interior Ministry.

This document, seen by *CNN*, targets three shipping companies operating at the airport, which is in Roissy, about 20 kilometers (13 miles) northeast of central Paris.

In 2004, the Paris Airport Authority – the authority in charge of all Paris airports – provided two prayer rooms for Muslims. But they were not being used by Islamic radicals, the document says.

Instead, the document says, there were “illegal prayer sites at the airport used by several Muslim airport workers” who at the time “belonged to mosques preaching radical Islam” in their neighborhoods on the Paris outskirts, including Argenteuil, Sevran and Bobigny.

The radical airport workers, the document says, were “easily swayed young people who are mostly Muslim,” coming from “the same neighborhood, the same cities.”

The document says that sometimes several members of the same family, who appeared to be radicalized, worked at the airport together. These families,

the document said, seemed to be “the leaders of this movement.”

According to the document, some of these people “openly showed anti-American views and showed their support and enthusiasm regarding the 9/11 attacks.”

Some people working for airport cargo companies had “access to airside” – the other side of the security cordon from the street – and were “known by intelligence services as radicalized individuals and who are in a known security file ” and who traveled to “sensitive areas of the world in order to learn more about Islam.”

The French intelligence document indicated that airport workers thus radicalized had received training by Al Qaeda:

The document lists the names of several airport workers who appeared to have been radicalized after trips to Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, India and Mali.

Some of the airport workers also appeared to be close friends with “people traveling to paramilitary training camps,” according to the document.

It mentions trips to the University of Dimaj in the city of Sa’dah, Yemen, in 1997 and 1998, where there was a paramilitary training camp financed by Osama bin Laden.

The document says the threat could be more significant because “some individuals are temporary workers” and some of them “are still unknown to the intelligence services.”

The document says these three companies worked with “10 temporary employment agencies and it is particularly difficult to monitor every single temporary airport worker.”



**Dr. Jill Bellamy, Bio-warfare expert**  
**UN Counter Terrorism Task Force**

**Fresh concerns over possible CBW threats to airport security.**

[Dr. S. Jill Bellamy](#) is a recognized international expert on biological warfare and a member of the United Nations Counter Terrorism Task Force. She has previously developed and run NATO sponsored policy programs on biological terrorism and has published extensively in related fields. Bellamy suggested that French Premier Valls' expressions of concerns over possible use of CBW (chemical and biological weapons) by ISIS in terror attacks in the West were reflective of recent uses of chemical weapons by the Islamic State in Syria. She pointed out that ISIS and other Islamic terror groups like al Nusrah and Hezbollah, wouldn't refrain from using CBW, as they simply consider them another weapon in their inventory. The October 2001 anthrax exposures at the US Senate Office Building, and US Postal Service processing facilities resulted in the deaths of five of more than 22 diagnosed cases and treatment of 27,000 USPS employees and cleanup cost of \$300 million. The Bush Administration launched an aggressive Bio-defense program increasing funding from \$305 million to more than \$5 billion annually over the period from 2001 to 2005. A NATO Parliamentary study of CBW detection [revealed](#) there was no fool proof method of detection. The NATO study further [noted](#) that biological agents lent themselves to terrorist use:

Biological agents attract terrorists because of their virulence, toxicity, transmissibility and lethality. They are relatively cheap to produce, sometimes readily available, and are also relatively easy to store and to transport. Moreover, besides naturally existing pathogens, terrorists could try to use engineered organisms. Experts believe that up to 1,000 toxins could be made of natural or genetic sources, although not all of them would be suitable for use as biological weapons. Pathogens are difficult to detect: they are colorless and odorless and have incubation periods, ranging from 48 hours for respiratory anthrax, to 21 days for Q-fever.

Dr. Bellamy was particularly concerned about major European and US airports whose physical configurations and proximity to transportation nodes lend themselves to possible terrorist use. Thus, given the French intelligence assessment of radicalized Muslim airport workers, trained by ISIS, Al Qaeda and Hezbollah in releases of both chemical and biological agents are an abiding concern.



## **What US Investigations Reveal about Airport Workers Security Screening and Contracting Practices**

For the international airline industry it may have profound implications for assuring security for passengers and operations both at home and in destinations adjacent to jihadist conflict zones. If airport or airline servicing contractors were involved, then a major security gap would be opened by this latest aviation terrorism episode and evidence of airport worker radicalization from French Intelligence.

The downing of the Metrojet with its innocent Russian victims has more than just Russian, Egyptian and Israeli concerns. From investigations by the [Wall Street Journal](#), [CNN](#) and others, security clearances for refugee baggage handlers, catering, and cleaning personnel with access to the tarmac and aircraft here in the US is lax. That was the subject of a *Fox News* interview with ex-CIA Director, R. James Woolsey. Woolsey referred to the investigation conducted by Lisa Benson and her team at the National Security Task Force of America who completed a yearlong investigation into airport outsourcing contracting practices and employment of low wage refugees at more than 13 US airports. Those refugees were brought into the US under the federal Refugee Act of 1980 with annual allotments controlled by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and administered by the \$2 billion Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration in our State Department. Woolsey cited the death of an American Somali ISIS Jihadi, Abdirahmaan Muhumed, in Syria in September 2014. It [revealed](#) his employment as a cleaner for [Delta Global Services, Inc.](#) which gave him security access to Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport. Muhumed had access to the entire tarmac area where 90,000 passengers transited each day. He had been employed for a decade as first a fueler and later aircraft cleaner from 2001 to 2011 by Delta Global Services, Inc. and other airport maintenance contractors. In 2011, he was either fired or left on his own accord to fight and die for the Islamic State in Syria leaving behind 9 children born by four different women. Yet, he could pass FBI background investigation checks and with his Secure ID Area (SIDA) tag was simply waved through by security guards on to the airport tarmac without any daily screening.

This is not the only instance. A TSA Inspector General [investigation](#) found 73 screeners and technicians who were listed on US terrorist watch lists. Moreover, the TSA was found to employ refugees as translator/screeners at major

airports. An NBC Channel 5 TV News [investigation](#) at Atlanta's airport found that hundreds of SIDA badges missing. Ambassador Woolsey's disclosures on the *Fox News* report went viral with reports on *CNN*, *MSNBC*, *News.Max* and *the Blaze*.

[Watch](#) this You Tube video of the *FoxNews* interview with Ambassador Woolsey:

On the November 8<sup>th</sup> , 2015 *Lisa Benson Show*, Woolsey [suggested](#) that the US transportation system was vulnerable to breaches of airline and airport security leaving little to thwart aircraft cleaners, baggage handlers or caterers from secreting possible explosives onboard flights. He referred to the 1988 Pan Am 103 Lockerbie, Scotland bombing that used a portable radio with Semtex, a general purpose plastic explosive containing RDX and PETN, in the luggage of a passenger as one example. Then there were the Shoe and Underwear Bombers who passed airline screening only to be caught on board flights when the bombs malfunctioned. There was the devilish work of the Saudi engineer for Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula who filled printer cartridges with PTEN explosives which were intercepted on a UPS cargo flight in Chicago before being delivered to a local Jewish Federation office. Woolsey told Benson's listeners that we are at war with global jihadist groups like ISIS, AQ, Hezbollah and others. Yet we don't screen airport maintenance and TSA personnel at our peril. Richard Cutting, a member of the Benson Advisory Board who called into the program agreed with Ambassador Woolsey that in the wake of the Metrojet Flight 9268 bombing, a major Congressional investigation should be mounted into these revelations. Woolsey drew attention to what he considered as the weak responses of TSA officials who appeared at the House Government Operations and Oversight Committee hearings on November 3<sup>rd</sup> to questions about lax screening of employed personnel at ground operations at many US airports. Woolsey concluded, "If a plane goes down, or if more than one U.S. plane goes down, there goes our airline/travel industry."



**ISS Facility Services, Inc. receiving 2009 State of Utah Refugee Employer of the Year**

**How International Airport Custodial and Maintenance Firms are Awarded Contracts Employing Low Wage Workers**

*The Lisa Benson Radio Show* was spurred to conduct an investigation into problems at 13 airports in the US through a chance encounter with a Southwest Airlines pilot who attended a Republican conference in March 2014 in Sun City, Arizona. He was waiting patiently until Benson, a keynote speaker at the conference, had completed her talk. He had news about an encounter with two Somali Muslim refugees who were cleaning an aircraft at Sky Harbor airport when he noticed Arabic writing in one of the lavatories. That exchange with Benson spawned an eight month investigation into the award of a \$10 million annual janitorial and maintenance contract by the Phoenix City council to a Danish company, [ISS Worldwide Services A/S](#) and its US subsidiary, ISS Facility Services, Inc. The contrast is with security conscious Israel where the airport workers are professionals in all aspects of airport service and security. The lower wage earners, the less educated, are the airport workers who present the threat to our safety in the air. That was underlined in the US with a one day work stoppage November 18-19, 2015 just before the Thanksgiving holiday by 2,000 low wage employees seeking a \$15 per hour rate at seven major airport hubs in an action sponsored by the Service Employees International Union. [CNN Money reported](#):

The workers, mostly cabin and airport cleaners, were picketing at John F. Kennedy and LaGuardia airports in New York City, as well as airports in Newark, N.J., Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago and Fort Lauderdale, Fl., according to the SEIU.

ISS Worldwide employs over a half million through their outsourced network of airport and commercial facilities maintenance contracts. ISS specializes in a broad range of facility management services especially for airport authorities, municipalities and major manufacturing companies. Preliminary research revealed ISS as a major international group specializing in airport and municipal facilities maintenance outsourcing. Subsequent research by the Benson National Security Task Force team of volunteers uncovered that ISS won contracts in 13 cities often with high bids. In the case of Sky Harbor in Phoenix at least \$1 million over the next lowest bidder, in Orlando more than \$2.4 million and in Detroit the award at excessive cost levels above competitors resulted in a law suit against the airport authority. Those contracts were awarded not on cost, but rather on other subjective criteria. Benson then turned over the completion of investigations into the awards made to ISS to her National Security Task



Force team.

During the past several years the US subsidiary of ISS has won a number of US airport facility management contracts. Among those was the one for Sky Harbor in Phoenix that prompted the comment from the Southwest Airlines flight captain, who spotted some Somalis during ground cleaning of his aircraft. ISS has tie-ins with US and foreign refugee resettlement groups hence the employment of low-wage Somalis and others. ISS may draw from this refugee pool throughout its global network, as those positions are at the bottom rung of both pay and training requirements. Further, ISS, like Delta Global Services in the Twin Cities Airport example, may have referral arrangements with major refugee resettlement voluntary agencies and major private job placement agencies in the US.

## **Conclusion**

The late ISIS fighter Muhumed had no criminal record in the United States that would have prevented him from getting a job at the airport. This revelation following his death should raise the concerns of both the TSA and Homeland Security regarding screening of airport and aircraft maintenance personnel. Moreover, as Ambassador Woolsey noted without active community policing programs of the type implemented by former New York City Mayors Giuliani and Bloomberg, recruitment by ISIS of airport employees with the help of radical imams could not have been detected. His comment was buttressed by the release of the 2004 French intelligence report that surfaced after the November 13<sup>th</sup>, Paris ISIS attacks. Amazingly, one of the first actions of current New York Mayor Di Blasio was to request that NYPD Commissioner Bill Bratton cease such intelligence programs. Thus, the downing of the Metrojet in Egypt by alleged ISIS perpetrators reverberates here in the US.

FBI Director James Comey warned that ISIS jihadis lurk among us in all 50 states. Comey has said that the FBI [currently](#) has 900 on-going investigations into ISIS persons of interest in the US. During the Thanksgiving 2015 peak travel period when 47 million Americans were on the move, the FBI [launched](#) high priority surveillance of 48 high-risk ISIS suspects. How many of those cases involve airport maintenance and TSA screening personnel, illustrates the merits of a major Congressional investigative hearing into out-sourcing contract awards, hiring and security screening practices at major US airports. All we need is just one incident to occur in the US equivalent to the downing of

Metrojet Flight 9268 with a major loss of life to virtually shut down the air transportation network. It took a chance encounter at a Sun City, Arizona conference to trigger a citizens' investigation by Lisa Benson and her National Security Task Force of America to show how vulnerable we really are to terrorist actions against the 35 million air travelers who fly our nation's skies unguarded.

---

Also see Jerry Gordon's collection of interviews,