

General Aviation in Canada

Issue: A Canadian approach to general aviation (GA) security.

Objective: To develop a coherent strategy for general aviation that seeks to identify and mitigate risks to the security of Canada's GA sector while maintaining the economic viability of the industry and comparability with our international partners.

Introduction

There is a growing view within the security community that the array of Post-September 11, 2001, enhancements to regularly scheduled commercial aviation will push some terrorist groups to focus on softer aviation targets, such as those operations associated with general aviation. These aircraft may be vulnerable to acts of unlawful interference, including bombing, hijacking, and their use as delivery mechanisms for weapons of mass destruction. In addition, there is concern that these flights could be used for transporting terrorists into North America.

Background

A lack of a coordinated approach to Canada's GA security has resulted in a gap in Canada's overall aviation security regime, one that could be exploited by terrorists. Various bodies have identified the gap in Canada's aviation security, including:

- The Submissions to the Inquiry into the Investigation of the Bombing of Air India 182;
- The Senate Standing Committee on National Security and Defence; and
- The CATSA Act Review Panel.

Although there is currently no International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standard for the security of private air operations, a number of Canada's major international partners are moving forward with plans to enhance GA security, including Australia, the European Union, and the United States (U.S).

According to Statistics Canada, there were approximately 60,000 itinerant movements involving GA aircraft in February 2009, including 7,000 trans-border movements (between the U.S. and Canada). The risk of a terrorist incident occurring in, or originating from Canada using GA aircraft, is real. In addition to the potential loss of life should an attack occur, the persistent risk could further darken the economic outlook for the GA community in Canada. Yet, to date, TC has been reacting to U.S initiatives without developing a clear policy of its own.

The risk posed to general aviation requires that the Government of Canada develop an effective strategy for enhancing GA security, one that is tailored to meet the needs of Canada's GA community, while maintaining comparability with our international partners and the economic viability of the industry.

Context

The Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities has the regulatory authority, under the *Aeronautics Act*, for the safety and security of Canada's aviation system, including GA operations. TC's safety responsibilities pertaining to general aviation include, among other things, licensing pilots, testing standards, and maintaining a Canadian Aircraft Register. On the security side, the department is responsible for establishing rules and standards for: transportation facilities; screening of air travellers and their baggage; reporting and responding to security threats and incidents; restricting access to certain parts of airports to authorized personnel only; and training and qualifying security screeners.

To a large extent, these rules do not apply to general aviation, which typically depart away from the air terminal building (ATB) at smaller, private aviation facilities or installations, often referred to as fixed base operations (FBOs). Under the Canadian Aviation Security Regulations, fixed base operations (FBOs) within the secure area, along with the aerodrome operators, are obliged to observe physical security (access control) and incident reporting requirements. In addition, security advisories can be issued to the GA community to encourage the appropriate security-related business practices. In the case of FBO operators, this is often done through the airports at which they are tenants.

Any proposal for addressing identified gaps in GA security, however, will need to take into account the risk level, with a recognition that the threat posed to a large commercial plane may not apply to a smaller, private aircraft. As such, a range of options will need to be explored, from the development of voluntary guidelines to more formal security arrangements, such as regulating best practices, expanding the defined restricted area, or passenger and baggage screening for certain higher-risk flights.