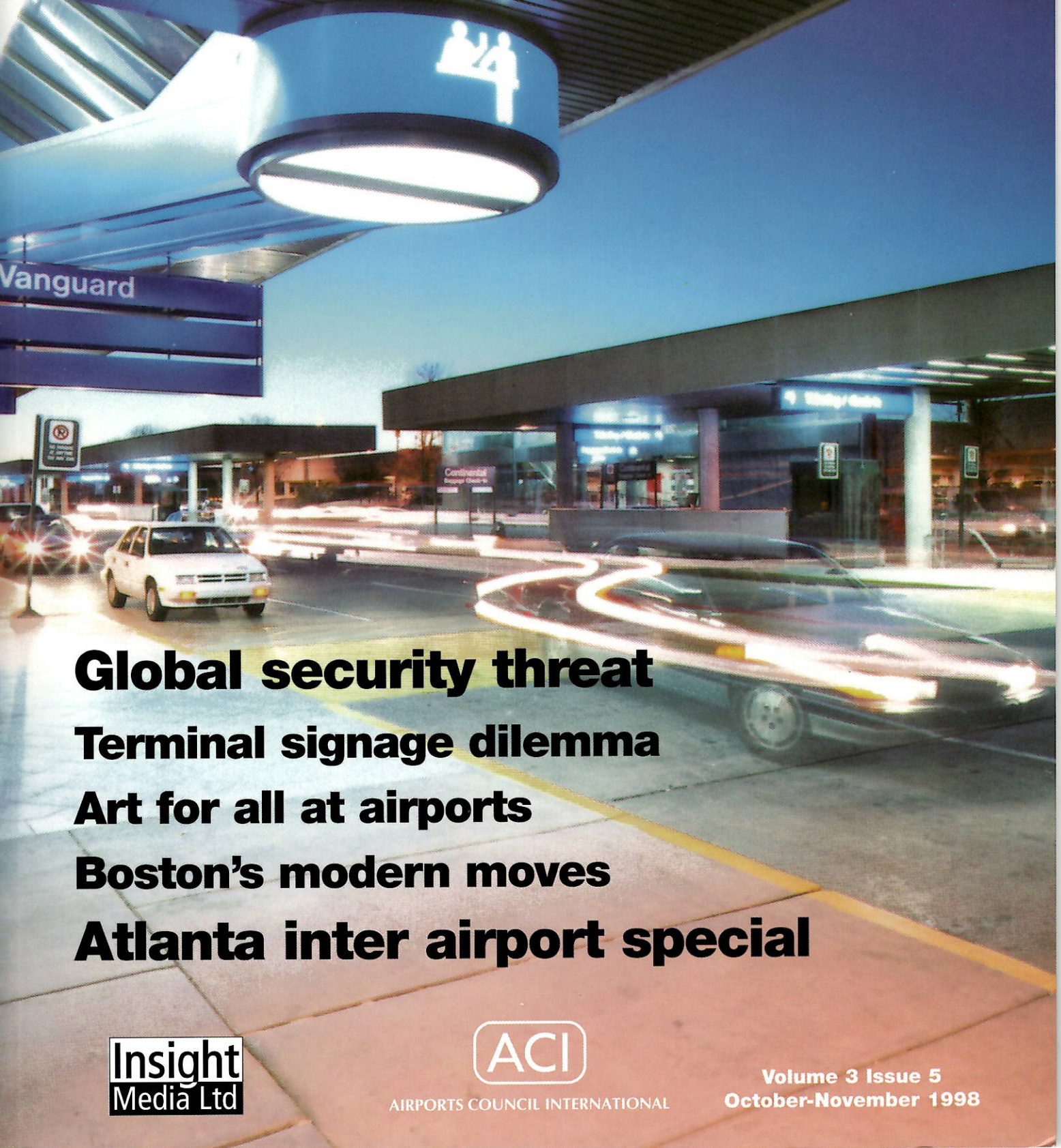


# AIRPORT WORLD

THE MAGAZINE OF THE AIRPORTS COUNCIL INTERNATIONAL



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# Protecting the 'soft underbelly'

**Expensive new high technology equipment is protecting large airports in developed nations. Airports in poorer parts of the world, such as Africa, can improve their security more cost effectively through better training. Philip Baum reports.**

Terrorist attacks against aviation generally have been associated with the European and Middle Eastern arenas. However, on 7 August 1998 the aviation community had to wake up to the fact that international terrorism recognises no borders and that Africa could serve as its new 'playground'. The bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, and subsequent outrage in South Africa, sent out a clear message: terrorism is a global problem.

While neither airlines nor airports were the targets, the terrorist groups concerned demonstrated clearly that they have both the capability and the mind-set to attack the aviation industry next time – and there will be a next time.

The advances made in the development of new technologies in the fight against terrorism are phenomenal. From the basic black and white X-ray machines introduced to airports in the 1960s and 1970s, we have now moved on to colour systems with a wide variety of image enhancement features and to other screening methods such as CT Scan and explosive vapour/particle detection technologies.

However, to date it is the prime target airports that are being equipped with such solutions, as well as those other airports that can afford to purchase them. The security shield that protects travellers using larger airports such as Manchester, Brussels, Tel Aviv and Hong Kong might seem impenetrable, but in a sense all this has done is to increase the

threat at the more exposed airports of the world. Airports whose governments or relevant authorities do not have the budget to purchase the latest technologies are thus made more vulnerable. It is highly plausible that the selection of American embassy buildings in Africa as targets can be attributed, in part, to their being located in an area of the world ill-equipped to prevent such incidents.

### **Security threats in Africa**

The African continent has had its fair share of hijackings, though asylum seekers and criminals on the run have carried out most of these. While most hijackings end without injury or loss of life, the Ethiopian Airlines incident in November 1996 demonstrated that they can also pose a real threat. Few in the industry will forget the scenes of bodies being carried by tourists and locals from the wreckage to the shores of the Comoros Islands.

The 1989 sabotage of a UTA airliner over the Sahara showed that terrorism also presents a threat in Africa. That was almost a decade ago, during a period of world-wide aircraft bombings including Pan Am over Lockerbie and Avianca in Colombia.

Now that the relative quiet of the 1990s has been disturbed, all airports – especially African ones – have to re-evaluate their security programmes (assuming that the airport has a security programme in the first place).

Some will decide that the money can be found to upgrade equipment and many airlines are likely to put pressure on them to do so, especially those airports considered as regional hubs. Overseas governments will also be keen to inspect airports to ensure their compliance with ICAO Annex 17, and they may also stipulate additional measures based upon specific regional threat circumstances.

Without a national policy, in the form of a National Aviation Security Programme, and an airport-specific plan, there is no foundation upon which to build an effective security structure. Although documentation may seem to be a bureaucratic burden, it provides parameters and clearly identifies areas of responsibility. Many different agencies might have their role to play in safeguarding aviation: the military, police, immigration, customs, the airport authority, airlines, drug squads, private security companies and national intelligence agencies. Ensuring that all can work in harmony with each other is a prerequisite.

### **The vital role of security staff**

Passenger screening is often considered the core of any airport security programme. Whichever agency has the responsibility for screening, it is the individuals performing these tasks that can make the difference.

There is considerable debate regarding the pitiful levels of pay



afforded in even the most industrialised of countries – G7 states included. In Africa the same debate rages. There is no escaping the fact that security does cost money, be it for equipment or personnel. Airports have a choice to make: security can either be cosmetic, with untrained, unmotivated and poorly paid staff at checkpoints, or proper investment can be made in security staff. The long-term effect of having educated, keen and satisfied employees is that airlines will favour the airport and may even switch traffic there from airports offering a poorer service.

The development of international training programmes is vitally important but training must be airport-specific. New recruits, and in many locations those who have been employed for some time, need to have a clear understanding of the security operations at their airport and what the precise security functions are at each of the posts that they might be asked to man.

Although the general calibre of personnel in Africa may not match their counterparts in Europe, employees who are provided with professional training on location will be effective. The training, however, must reflect Africa-specific issues for relevance and incorporate parades and physical exercise to encourage discipline.

## **Bribery, diplomats and security**

If you ask a class of security students in Europe how they would try to get around security at a given airport, you will get a wide variety of answers ranging from infiltrating a bag into the baggage handling system to duping another passenger. In Africa, almost all the class will answer the same: 'bribery'.

It is an inescapable fact, and no secret, that bribery (which can also be called tipping, charity, baksheesh or corruption) is a part of everyday life in Africa. It is not necessarily even viewed as wrong. And for the person on the receiving end, if their salary does not enable them to provide their family with the basic foodstuffs to survive, the temptation to accept an illicit offering is high.

To prevent this, the authorities need to offer salaries that, at the very least, make acceptance of a bribe inexcusable. Staff must also

be rotated in their positions daily in order to limit the possibility of a pre-planned bribe. Thereafter, it is down to training and ensuring that the guards understand the risks to which they are exposing the airport. An audit/test programme needs to be implemented that will monitor the problem and Draconian measures must be taken against guards found accepting bribes. In short, no warnings – the first time you are caught, you are out of a job.

Diplomatic immunity is another subject that is cause for concern on the African continent. Although guards are trained that they may search a diplomat and their baggage and that it is only an official diplomatic pouch that is exempt from search, the diplomats concerned choose to interpret their immunity as grounds for the complete exemption from any screening.

It is amazing how many people can manage to possess diplomatic passports. Some governments have made public proclamations that airport screening is a process to which all travellers are subject – with no exceptions. The reality is that many officials can and do threaten any security guard that, in their view, has the audacity to request a bag be opened. Quite understandably, the guard often backs down genuinely fearing the loss of his/her job.

It will take time for states to appreciate that it is no longer acceptable for security staff to be undermined. Tribal chiefs must appreciate that their followers can not escort them to the gate and airport management must have the backbone to support their security personnel rather than chastise them at the request of an official whose ego has been damaged. It is all very well for people to question the right of the US or European countries to enforce their 'values' in other parts of the world, but those values are only trying to protect the lives of passengers in this case.

## **The value of training**

Training is a necessity not only for the security guards and their supervisors, but for everyone in the airport environment. A cohesive security infrastructure depends upon a common understanding of the airport's

objectives and the procedures by which such objectives will be met. It is a matter of knowing the procedures and appreciating the security logic behind them.

Many regard training as an initial process through which one must go when joining an organisation. In an aviation security environment initial 'induction' training is simply the tip of the iceberg. Annual recurrent training, periodic testing and daily briefings should all form part of the educational package we provide.

Security guards in many parts of the world are exposed daily to trends in international politics through satellite television, international journals and the Internet. But, in many parts of Africa, those performing security duties are still very isolated. Many live in places where literacy is poor, newspapers are weeklies rather than dailies and hardly touch on international issues, where television broadcasts are low-budget enterprises and few have even heard of the Internet. As a result, their level of threat appreciation is often very low.

It is the job of the airport management to ensure that security personnel understand that while attacks against aviation are exceptionally rare, there is still a threat and the next attack might be at their airport. The value of a regular, daily flow of information cannot be under-estimated; knowledge motivates and a motivated security force is an alert and determined security force.

**Bag search training at Murtala Muhammed Airport, Lagos, Nigeria.**







**Security is much improved in the new terminal at Banjul, which opened in 1997**

One African airport that has been through an internal security revolution is Banjul in the Gambia. Eager to cater for flights to and from the US, the authorities appreciated that the airport would have to enhance its security. Initially it contracted a

firm of security consultants to carry out a security audit of the airport to assess areas of weakness. It then drafted both a National Aviation Security Programme and an Airport Security Programme, from which it developed security procedures

that were, through formal classroom training, passed on to all security guards and supervisors.

New X-ray machines, archway detectors, CCTV equipment and an ID Unit were purchased to coincide with the airport's move to a newly constructed terminal. It has not been a problem-free process and some individuals were reluctant to accept change. However, the airport authority remains determined to meet international standards.

Through investing in equipment, providing staff with training and commissioning a company to provide on-site security consultancy services for an 18-month period, the airport's reputation in the region has been enhanced and its growth potential improved. Security and Africa do go hand in hand; will-power is all that's needed to achieve it.

*Philip Baum is managing director of Green Light Ltd., an ACI World Business Partner that provides aviation security training and consultancy services. He is also the editor of Aviation Security International.*

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