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AVIATION SECURITY QUALITY CONTROL: STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE

Quality as a concept describes the relationship between requirements and outcomes, the difference between what we expect and what we get. It requires the pursuit of excellence, which is achieved through continuous improvement and mutual learning, cooperation and involvement of all aviation related staff.

ICAO Annex 17 requires States to establish an aviation security organisation and to develop and implement regulations, practices and procedures to safeguard civil aviation against acts of unlawful interference. States have the possibility to apply through their own aviation security system more stringent measures than those designed by ICAO Annex 17's provisions. Though the trend is towards harmonisation of the implementation of the aviation security standards this does not mean that measures should be identical but should have the same end in view. These should nonetheless be mutually recognised by States providing equivalent levels of security while allowing some operational flexibility to accommodate/deal with specific local conditions.

To ensure the implementation of Annex 17 standards (and all other ICAO annexes containing security-related provisions), each State designates and empowers an Appropriate Authority for aviation security. Through these authorities, States establish a comprehensive policy (the National Civil Aviation Security Programme) to be implemented by all stakeholders in their civil aviation security structure, i.e. airport operators, air carriers, air navigation services, providers of security services, etc. The State's Appropriate Authority for aviation security holds responsibility for addressing preventive and responsive security measures, together with responsibilities for oversight and quality control measures over all aspects of a State's national civil aviation security system.

For a successful application of aviation security measures it is fundamental that controls are applied in a way that provides effective aviation security. For this reason the Appropriate Authority develops, implements and maintains a National Civil Aviation Quality Control Programme to determine compliance and validate the continuing effectiveness of the National Civil Aviation Security Programme. In order to achieve this task, the Appropriate Authority is given authority and responsibility by the State for exercising continuing surveillance over aviation security operations to ensure that the implementation of security measures is compliant with the National Civil Aviation Security Programme. Furthermore, the Appropriate Authority is empowered to conduct audits, inspections, surveys and tests on a regular basis, analyse security measures, identify and effectively correct deficiencies, and review and re-evaluate security controls and procedures.

The National Civil Aviation Quality Control Programme must promote and establish an environment of continual improvement and enhancement of aviation security and related staff involvement. Continuous improvement implies, first of all, that neither standards nor procedures are written

Annex 17 of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), is the primary source of Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) for the establishment and management of a State's national civil aviation system, by addressing preventive and responsive security measures. The fundamental challenge for the establishment and management of such a civil aviation security system is to create an aviation security regime that is highly effective in preventing acts of unlawful interference and ensures compliance with specific regulations but does not unduly interfere with the efficiency of civil aviation, impose excessive costs or intrude unnecessarily into private rights or civil liberties. Diana M. Stancu outlines the national aviation security quality control system as envisaged by ICAO and considers various stakeholders' responsibilities for providing an effective and robust system.

in stone, but should be subject to scrutiny and challenge, based on assessment, evaluation and learning from and benchmarking against best practices and second of all, that it can be achieved not only consistently, but in changing circumstances and conditions. The involvement of staff with aviation security duties and responsibilities in the pursuit of quality means that quality is everybody's business; participation often being regarded as a tool for improving efficiency.

“...a well established and managed national quality control system, through its analysis of various audit/inspection reports, will indicate a pattern of weaknesses and deficiencies...”

It is of paramount importance that entities responsible for the management, setting of priorities and organisation of the National Civil Aviation Quality Control Programme operate independently from those responsible for the implementation of measures under the National Civil Aviation Security Programme.

All aviation security stakeholders involved in the implementation of the National Civil Aviation Security Programme may be required to develop, implement and maintain their own internal quality control assurance procedures, which are approved and monitored by the Appropriate Authority for aviation security. This internal quality control system establishes and provides for the stakeholder's self-regulation, which actually facilitates a change in relationship between the stakeholder and the Appropriate Authority that is now charged with the monitoring of the performance of the stakeholder for continued conformance with its own prescribed policies and procedures. These policies and procedures

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need to be submitted for approval to the authority for compliance with the national aviation security requirements.

A well established and managed national quality control system, through its analysis of various audit/inspection reports, will indicate a pattern of weaknesses and deficiencies, as well as causes and possible remedies. Frequency of performing such audits/inspections and for reviewing their scope and related techniques and procedures is determined (or it should be) on the basis of risk assessment carried out by the relevant aviation security authority empowered with such task.

Clearly, the ICAO Annex 17 requirements outline the what and not the how to do, as measures should be tailored to fit each State’s particular aviation environment.

Quality of Governance

States are ultimately responsible for the management of the aviation security policy as a whole. However, it is considered preferable that States do not assume themselves the entire responsibility for the aviation security policy management to the exclusion of other authorities which also have aviation security-related functions, namely customs, immigration, law enforcement just to name a few. A balanced allocation of responsibilities and a clear separation of roles should be aimed for and responsibility for the prevention of acts of unlawful interference against civil aviation shared.

Concerning the implementation of the provisions of the National Civil Aviation Security Programme, some roles and responsibilities can be delegated, the nature of delegation varying from one State to another. Some of these delegated functions are “standard practice”, like for example, the airport management and aircraft operators are tasked with the establishment, implementation and maintenance of an Airport Security Programme, and Air Carrier Security Programme respectively, appropriate to meet the requirements of the National Civil Aviation Security Programme, which are to be submitted for approval to and monitored by the Appropriate Authority.

With the advent of global trends to privatise airports and government services, like for instance, the operational aspects of aviation security programmes which are outsourced to private companies, the need for a strong regulatory aviation security oversight became relevant. To reach high levels of security in this case, appropriate performance standards should be set and closely monitored. Nevertheless, it must be remembered here that, even though outsourcing may be an effective alternative to State-run security provided services, States remain responsible for ensuring compliance by these privatised companies, with the security standards contained in the Annexes to the Chicago Convention of 1944.

Security functions performed by civil servants, where the State is both the regulator and a service provider or operator, creates confusion as the State-run entity holding responsibility for implementation, like the army, the police or special forces, is frequently more authoritative than the State’s Appropriate Authority for aviation security responsible for, inter alia, the monitoring and control of such implementing entities, making it very difficult to exercise its oversight function. States experiencing such a situation have envisaged the establishment of an independent governmental entity empowered with oversight responsibilities, an entity established at the highest level within the government that is not part of the Appropriate Authority.

In all cases, it is essential that States set up an effective and

robust aviation system, that is not a “paper” one with standards implemented and quality control programmes approved “tick-the-box”-like, where controls and accountability are established at all levels of the security system, and that a clear distinction and separation of authority and responsibility exists between the State aviation security regulatory authority and the State-run aviation security services provider or operator.

In the current aviation security environment, quality does not breed excellence but conformance to requirements. A regulatory compliance-oriented system assumes that requirements and subsequent proposed measures are correct, which renders it weak. I believe that aviation security quality must expand from being a device for assuring conformity to requirements, into questions of performance and design. A good approach could be that States would progress further in developing a security-driven surveillance system, moving away from a regulatory compliance-oriented system to a performance-based oversight system, where awareness of the effectiveness of their measures, practices and results achieved would be measured and compared with the best in class and improvements identified. Such an aviation security oversight system would then promote comprehensive and realistic performance criteria, defined as precisely as possible and linked to the very core of the aviation security discipline, where its effectiveness is assessed and best practices are benchmarked considering local cultures and environments.

I believe that the current challenge is that quality control in an aviation security environment will cease to be simply linear, improving conformance and will begin to take account of the fact that the wide range of aviation related demands (often not complementary to each other and at times even contradictory) together with the continuously changing threats requires strong leadership and comprehensible performance criteria. And leaders need a quality philosophy and a systematic and integrative approach, combining risk assessment

“...Amendment 12 of ICAO Annex 17 introduces the concept of unpredictability of security measures...”

and strategy, control and culture, to be ready to effectively respond to any act of unlawful interference. This approach is also known as the Security Management System, a concept which is neither an ICAO nor a European Union standard. To contribute to the deterrent effect of aviation security measures, Amendment 12 of ICAO Annex 17 introduces the concept of unpredictability of security measures. The promotion and deployment of unpredictable security measures means, for example, that at an airport, the relevant authority can chose to install checkpoints prior to airport parking terminals, use profiling teams to detect unusual behaviour, canine teams or other unseen measures, just to list a few.

For the time being, the aviation security advocates agree that aviation security has not yet reached its mature stage for the implementation of an effective total management approach, but a successful worldwide implementation of the ICAO fostered quality control system is an essential step towards it. ■

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