ECA Position on Security Threat Information

1. Background

The IFALPA Security Committee recently agreed on a principle where notification about a credible threat to a specific flight should always be given immediately, without delay, to the aircraft commander (together with some other entities). This principle was motivated by some recent incidents where relaying threat information to commander was significantly delayed. The Security Committee also proposed this to be adopted as an official IFALPA policy.

2. Current documentation: ECAC Annex V-1-A "Guidance material on bomb threat assessment and procedures"

ECAC Annex V-1-A "Guidance material on bomb threat assessment and procedures", and specifically its attachment VI "Emergency plan", specifies the procedures in case of a bomb threat. The procedure identifies different ways to take action according to the different flight phases of the aircraft. The procedures clearly follow the idea that if the aircraft is below 5000 ft in climb or descent, the commander should not be informed.

> *Para 3: "If the aircraft is taking-off or has taken-off within the last five minutes, instruct ATC to inform the aircraft (only after passing 5000 ft) that a bomb threat call has been received which relates to that flight..."*
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> *Para 4: "If the aircraft is in the climb, cruise or descent phase and is above 5000 ft, instruct ATC to inform the aircraft that a bomb threat call has been received which relates to that flight and which is believed credible".*
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> *Para 5: "If the aircraft is below 5000 ft, and is about to make an approach to land, do not advise the pilot in command until the aircraft has completed its landing roll. The aircraft's planned parking position may be changed as a result of the threat assessment".*

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3. ECA's view on not informing the commander of a threat

After analyzing ECAC Annex V-1-A "Guidance material on bomb threat assessment and procedures", ECA has identified several security-related risks in this practice.

1. One should never 100% assume that an aircraft making a descent or approach will actually land. The approach might end in a go-around decision due to high speed or marginal weather, as late as from the short final. This would not be a desirable decision in case of an existing and credible security threat.

2. In the event of a technical problem during the approach phase, the pilots may also decide to halt the approach and remain in the holding pattern to troubleshoot a failure, which would otherwise not prevent a safe landing in case of an urgent threat situation, if the commander has been informed about it.

3. A bomb might be placed in the landing gear bay of an aircraft. In such a situation, it would be extremely beneficial for the commander to be aware of the threat when extending the landing gear, enabling him/her to be prepared for possible detonation.

4. As regards to the departure and climb phase, delaying the transmission of information until after the aircraft has reached 5000 ft could, in some circumstances, lead to a activation of a pressure-triggered detonator.

5. In addition, waiting for the aircraft to climb over 5000 ft could also significantly lengthen the time needed for a possible quick return to the departure aerodrome, should the commander foresee this action as the safest solution.

As a final note, ECA would like to highlight the fact that in a real threat situation, where everyone involved in the information chain is under a remarkable pressure, any procedure should be kept as simple and unambiguous as possible.

4. Conclusion

For the reasons mentioned above, ECA strongly recommends to ECAC to consider revising Annex V-1-A "Guidance material on bomb threat assessment and procedures" and include a provision stipulating the commander should be notified immediately and without delay about all possible safety and security threats towards his/her aircraft, regardless of the flight phase. Commanders are trained and responsible for evaluating situations as a whole (also from the CRM point of view), and to always conduct the safest decisions for the aircraft and its passengers.

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