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Chair

Mr. Merv Tweed

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● (1135)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC)): Good morning, everyone.

Welcome to meeting number 50 of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. Pursuant to the orders of the day under Standing Order 108(2), this is a study of aviation safety and security.

Before I introduce our guest today, I want to recognize Mr. Dhaliwal on a point of order.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to clarify my remarks of the February 15 meeting. Unfortunately, a misunderstanding occurred, and some members were offended by what I said. I had no intention of suggesting that Mr. Guimond or his colleagues are racist. I do not believe that he is and I did not intend to suggest that he is.

I regret that my remarks came across in that way. I apologize to my friend and his colleagues for this misunderstanding and I hope we can continue to work constructively on vital matters of transport, infrastructure, and communities at this committee.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dhaliwal.

Monsieur Guimond, do you have a comment?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This is the first suitable opportunity for me to say something since the unfortunate incident. I would like to reiterate that my questions were about an event that was made public and that indicated that two people were filmed with a cell phone at Dorval Airport. They were wearing the veil and were going through the final checkpoints at the boarding gate for Air Canada. My questions had to do with the facts only. I have consulted the “blues” and I have carefully read everything that was said word for word. It is true that my colleague, Mr. Dhaliwal, never said that my party and I were racist. But he did use the words “incompetent” or “intolerant”. I want to stress that Bloc Quebecois caucus members, myself included, are not intolerant towards people of other origins, and that we are not incompetent in the matter. Now that the record has been set straight, I accept my colleague’s apologies and I consider the matter closed.

[*English*]

The Chair: *Merci, monsieur Guimond*.

Moving forward, I will now introduce our guest, Joram Bobasch. He is the executive vice-president of ICTS Europe Holdings.

Welcome. We appreciate that you've come a long way to present to our committee. I think you understand the procedure. I'll ask you to present and then we'll move to committee questions.

Mr. Joram Bobasch (Executive Vice-President, ICTS Europe Holdings B.V., ICTS Europe): Good morning.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I thank you and of course the distinguished members of this committee for allowing me to appear. I am very honoured to be here today as part of your important and ongoing study into aviation safety and security.

As noted by the chair, my name is Joram Bobasch, and I'm the executive vice-president of ICTS Europe Holdings. We are one of the largest and most trusted aviation security companies in the world. In Canada, you may be aware of our affiliate, SEALS. SEALS stands for Security Excellence in Air, Land and Sea. That's our Canadian air arm of our international operations.

I hope my remarks and our discussions today will be helpful in your deliberations on this very important subject. I have personally spent decades in this industry and the opportunity to address Canadian parliamentarians is quite an honour for me.

I would like to start by introducing to you ICTS Europe—who we are and where we operate—and outline for you what we believe to be some of our core experiences that could contribute to the country's aviation security system. I would then like to touch on our commitment to the Canadian marketplace and of course would be willing to answer any questions you might have. I'm ready for the grilling.

ICTS was founded in 1982 as a consulting company. In the late eighties, it became a leader in the field of aviation security services. At present we comprise many subsidiaries, maintaining over 80 offices and locations—mainly in airports—in 27 countries, and employing over 13,000 employees. In comparison with the TSA, which employs about 48,000 screeners, we are probably the second-largest aviation screening operation worldwide, with the slight difference that we are privately owned and we operate in an international environment.

Almost literally, we have operations in most of all the major airports in Europe, and with our high-tech solutions, we serve more than 500 airports internationally. Our pride as a company has been the development of an unrivalled reputation for professional integrity, service quality, innovation, and responsible commercial practice.

To put the size of ICTS and its operations in perspective for committee members, we process on an annual basis probably three to four times more than all the passengers who are screened in Canada.

I have followed your committee's deliberations over the past year and also some of the policy developments that the government has made as a result of the strategic review of CATSA. Each country works to achieve its own security balance, and I hope that ICTS and our discussion today can be helpful for you as you work to achieve Canadian aviation security excellence.

The importance of a robust and comprehensive aviation security system cannot be overstated. The aviation industry has long been a target for attacks, and Canada has suffered direct tragic results of this targeting, with the Air India disaster in the eighties. The post-9/11 era spurred an unprecedented emphasis on aviation security, making it a significant concern and priority for travellers, government, and the international air community as a whole.

As a result, we have seen a flurry of changes to aviation security regulations and procedures. New measures have included the adoption of advanced screening procedures and technology, the expansion of the list of banned or prohibited items, increased inspection of baggage and cargo, increased information sharing between international partners—something, I understand, that you just voted on—and the enhanced presence of law enforcement. The application of those new, more stringent measures, while designed to counter emerging threats, has also garnered criticism from the public, who have begun to question whether these measures are reasonable, effective, and justified.

The primary objective of aviation security should be to safeguard passengers, personnel, and the general public from unlawful acts of interference on aircraft and at airports. Security threats range from unruly passenger behaviour through hijacking to terrorism.

● (1140)

While the security and safety of the general public should be of the utmost concern when considering aviation security policies, the corresponding mechanisms employed in support of this goal should not affect the efficiency of passenger flow and passenger service at the airport and in security systems. It is ICTS Europe's view that security measures should not be excessively expensive, should make sense for both passengers and staff, and should not cause unreasonable waiting times or interference with human rights.

When it comes to geography, local legislation, risk levels, and physical complexity, every airport in every country is unique in its own requirements. We believe it is essential to develop a control system that can adapt quickly, effectively, and in a flexible manner to current events, environments, and occurrences.

As a full aviation security company, therefore, ICTS develops and deploys innovative solutions that are flexible and scalable in order to meet airport security needs. These include the basic establishment of a comprehensive security concept that is based on an in-depth risk analysis. This is the basic start to every process that you see: what is the risk that we are dealing with? Then comes the design and implementation of all aspects of the system that might mitigate this assessed risk. And then comes doing the service, undertaking the full handling and control of the system, and supervising it.

What ICTS does in the 27 countries is sometimes to help the regulator, but mostly to accept from the regulator what is perceived and analyzed as the right risk and what the protocol is, what the procedures are for them to mitigate that risk, and then to make sure that the level of services is in compliance with those needs, knowing that we are dealing with human beings—and we only employ 13,000 of those. We know that the level of performance of employees varies, so it is at the level of compliance that is required from the employees worldwide—when they hit the bottom line—that we talk about the security protocols.

Our goal is actually to manufacture a system of compliance. ICTS Europe implements a far-sighted approach that allows multi-skilled individuals to work flexibly and efficiently together. They operate within the systems and structures specifically developed to deliver the optimum standard of streamlined, stress-free service while producing this kind of compliance.

Delays caused by rigorous screening processes or, at times, the complete shutdown of terminals, as we all know, result in significant economic losses. Delays—also called bottlenecks—at airports of origin can cause a domino effect of even more delays at the destination airports. We know that the major transportation at major airports is transiting, and if a passenger arrives late at a certain airport, he cannot board the next flight. Either the passenger's flight is delayed or the airplane is being delayed, so we have a domino effect. As aviation is a global product and we're talking globally about moving three billion people annually around the world—almost half of the world's population is travelling on an annual basis—a delay at a starting point can create a domino effect of a major delay at the end point.

Furthermore, airport tenants, such as retailers, suffer heavy losses as a result of events such as terminal closures, evacuations due to false alarms, and so on. We have seen this recently at London's Heathrow airport, which was closed due to weather. We saw it through the Christmas Day event of 2009 in Detroit. Another example would be last year's ash cloud over Europe.

The evolution of aviation security has seen a shift in recent years, whereby the nature of a potential individual and the nature of the threats may have changed significantly. As a result, authorities have reacted by adding new layers to their security protocols. However, it should be expected that these new security measures would actually correspond to current and to changing threats.

● (1145)

Another example you might remember occurred in August 2006. Due to new information that was guarded by the British intelligence forces, overnight there was a banning of the known LAGs, liquids and gels, which created chaos the next morning. But the requirement and the challenge for security systems is to react as fast as possible and to implement a new protocol overnight because the risk is as such.

If security staff become skeptical of the measures they are applying and do not understand the rationale behind them, soon they will fail to enforce them and follow the required procedures. Therefore, in order to ensure the proper deployment of new security measures, the security staff must understand them and recognize their purpose. When we are manufacturing compliance, one very, very important element is to monitor and to manage the personnel on the floor. This is one of the capabilities we have developed in the past years: monitoring the personnel.

It is also crucial that any procedures or techniques reflect the current status of research and development. Furthermore, staff must be oriented with the present security situation and be aware of any new threats. Every bit of up-to-date information will impact current security procedures. It is not only the technology but also the personnel that should be developed on a continuous basis through training and monitoring. Only a combination of up-to-date technology on the one hand and well-informed staff on the other hand will assure the most optimal level of security.

Canada is a big country geographically and a diverse one ethnically. Air services are critical to the movement of people, goods, and services. Therefore, it is essential for the Canadian way of life to ensure a safe and continuous air travel system. Studies like the one you are conducting are a great exercise, and I hope you will take the time to examine best practices internationally and apply those elements you believe will serve the Canadian public in the most appropriate manner.

Here in Canada, SEALS, an affiliate of ICTS Europe, has acquired A.S.P., which is a security service organization based in Burlington, Ontario. This acquisition is consistent with our desire to serve the Canadian market with the same level of excellence that we have achieved internationally over the past 25 years. It is an objective of the SEALS organization to utilize A.S.P.'s positioning and operational strength and ICTS Europe's experience and knowledge to offer significant additional value to the aviation sector within the security spectrum, thus leveraging our experience and introducing the beginning of a long and, we hope, very successful future in the Canadian market.

ICTS Europe aspires to be a fully engaged partner with the government and contribute to the public policy debate in Canada to ensure that Canadians continue to enjoy safe and secure and efficient aviation services.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me to give my opening remarks. I would be happy to take any of your questions.

● (1150)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. McCallum.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Bobasch, for being with us today and for your interesting presentation.

My first question is about air marshals on airplanes. I wonder if you could give us an idea of the extent to which they are used around the world, and whether you think they are an important part of airline security.

Mr. Joram Bobasch: This is an easy one. We are a private security company, and air marshals, as far as we are involved, are still a law enforcement task. Only government and governmental entities are allowed to bring weapons on board airplanes. This is a task that, according to the threat analysis and risk evaluation, is being conducted by various governments worldwide.

We know of their existence. Sometimes we even recognize the colleagues who are walking around. Nowadays, with the physical stature of those guys, it is very easy to identify them.

This is an area in which we are not involved actively. We know that it's part of mitigating the risk, but we are not suppliers of this part.

Hon. John McCallum: I understand that you're not suppliers, but I also understand that you have a broad knowledge of the whole issue of security. My question is whether you think that air marshals on planes are an essential, important, or not-so-important element in the total scheme of things.

Mr. Joram Bobasch: The question is more, I would say, if I may, what the risk is that you want to mitigate with this solution. If you anticipate that you will have a hijacker on board who will bypass all of the security regimes installed in all the airports, that those security people will not identify a possible hijacker, as happened on 9/11, and there is an information that on a certain flight a certain assassin will be able to infiltrate the airplane, then this could be the answer.

It could not be the answer, obviously, for mass production. On every flight, you could not have the first two rows of any airplane manned by air marshals.

It is related to and based on specific intelligence information and of course a lot of training. It's very risky.

● (1155)

Hon. John McCallum: Second, we've also had some controversy about the advisability of allowing people to go on flights with short scissors. Some of our unions representing flight attendants have strongly opposed this new policy on the grounds that it represents a risk to the passengers and the crews on the airplanes. I'm wondering if you have any views on that.

Mr. Joram Bobasch: We have to go two steps back before addressing the issue of the scissors. First of all, aviation is a global product, and it does not matter what a certain country, airline, or airport perceives as a risk. In order to harmonize, there has to be a global understanding about what can and cannot be brought on board.

If I have a bad intention, I can hijack an airplane with my glasses. I can use them to stab anyone, and then I can open the cockpit door and hijack the airplane. I don't need scissors for that, and there are probably more skilled people who don't need even the glasses. They can do it with their hands.

The question is the international understanding of the risk and the steps needed to mitigate it. We need to determine the list of allowed or prohibited items. If I had a pair of scissors, I wouldn't hijack an airplane, but I also don't hijack airplanes with my glasses. If I had a gun, I would not hijack an airplane either.

It is the intention and the information that matter, not so much the list of items. The list of items has to be agreed on globally and has to be implemented globally. Otherwise, it cannot produce a global product.

Hon. John McCallum: Right, but the list is not identical in every country in the world.

Mr. Joram Bobasch: It is identical in 95% of the world. There are still local requirements that allow a little bit more or a little bit less, but for most of the international travel in the west, the requirements are the same. I don't know what happens in China or in other places of the world, I really don't know, but I assume that if they want to be integrated with and accepted as a part of the international community, they will have to accept the levels that are used in North America, Europe, and South America. They will have to adopt the list of prohibited items.

Hon. John McCallum: Okay.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Monsieur Guimond.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Bobasch, Canada is going to increase the use of body scanners at airport checkpoints. It has been a while since I last went to Europe, in May 2010. Are body scanners being used in Europe more and more? As a specialist, an expert, and furthermore testifying before us in that capacity, what is your opinion on using body scanners? Do you think it is safer than manual searches? What is your opinion?

[*English*]

Mr. Joram Bobasch: Whole-body scanners or whole-body screening is a new technology that has been developed in order to mitigate additional risks that the walk-through metal detectors we have worldwide do not indicate on passengers. For instance, a knife that is made not from metal but from other ingredients would not be identified by a walk-through metal detector.

I'm a service expert, not a physician, and not a physical expert. But the challenge for the developers of those technologies would be to mitigate the risks of those items that could be concealed in the body and to identify them.

From what I've seen, the technology does go a step further, in my personal, humble, and very subjective opinion, but it's not there yet. On one hand, we have not yet seen 100% waterproof whole-body scanners that would identify without any doubt hidden items that are on this prohibited list. On the other hand, I'm not aware of the official results, but I know that the TSA did some testing—the TSA being the American authority—after the events of December 25, 2009, to try to see whether the whole-body scanner would identify the underwear in which the bomb was concealed. I understood—I don't have the results on hand—that the results weren't so positive.

It is definitely a step in the right direction. From what I have seen personally at exhibitions and in some of the airports in Europe, it is still in the trial process. Some machines have been installed. They still have a problem with the terrible word “throughput”. As you know, one of the things that airports are measuring is how many passengers they can manage to get through a checkpoint in an hour. If a passenger is standing in front of a checkpoint and has to take a lot of items off his body in order to go through a whole-body scanner, that creates a longer process for x-raying those objects. It's a very short process to go through the whole-body scanner, but the whole process becomes longer.

It is a step in the right direction. It is not there yet, but the nice thing about technology, hopefully, is that they will develop a solution that will be satisfactory with regard to this known list of prohibited items in a manner that will not create an additional obstacle for the passengers when they are standing in front of this checkpoint and trying to take off all the shoes, jackets, watches, and pens and whatever.

● (1200)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: I have one last question, Mr. Chair.

When someone testifies on a topic, to some extent, they are expressing a personal opinion and making a value judgment. How do you assess the control systems in force in the United States, Canada and Europe? Of the three examples I mentioned, is one better than the other or are they completely sufficient, equivalent and effective?

[*English*]

Mr. Joram Bobasch: I think we have to look back into the history. Most of the happenings in the North American market for commercial aviation security are a result of the 9/11 era.

Prior to 9/11 in North America, commercial aviation security was perceived as having one of the lower levels of risk and, therefore, being at a lower level for requirements to comply with, due to the fact that the local threat was perceived as lower than it actually was. Then came the events of 9/11. As an outcome of such a surprise, there is also a reaction of paranoia and chaos.

Ten years later, I believe that TSA and CATSA—CATSA more quickly than TSA because of its size—have succeeded in presenting the new generation that can adapt to the new threat situation that was presented in 9/11: to harmonize procedures according to the then existing risk situation and to present a higher level of security services than there was before.

We passed through a similar situation in Europe, 20 years ago, and it was not because we were smarter or faster in Europe. It's because 20 years ago the Iron Curtain was raised and it was the job of the regulators to see where the borders were and where the risks were. Having moved to the east...there was a vacuum that was created and a need for a commercial solution in aviation security in mainland Europe. We started in the process a bit earlier due to a political situation.

That's why one might assume that processes, changes, and discussions like this have taken place in Europe a bit earlier. I think a step in the maturity of the process is a meeting or a study like you are conducting right now, to say okay, we're now 10 years down the line, so what did we achieve, what did we pay, what did we get, what is the level of service, what is the level of the security that we are producing, and is it up to the expectations of the public?

Having said that as a remark, I believe that in Europe we started earlier with the perception that what 3 billion people buy annually—a flight ticket—is a service and we're service suppliers. The perception of aviation security in North America is still as an obstacle and not as a service. This is still a challenge to be met. You have a wonderful infrastructure. You have wonderful terminals. You have wonderful locations. But passengers, as they enter the terminal, still don't perceive it as accepting a service. Sometimes they do, but they perceive it as a burden.

As an example, I was at a meeting two months ago in Washington, in which John Pistole, the head of the TSA, was very proud to announce that during Thanksgiving, which is one of the holidays when there is increased traffic, only in 10 of the major airports did the waiting lines exceed 30 minutes. If you go to a restaurant and you wait 30 minutes for the waiter to come to you, you don't perceive it as a good service. The fact that he has already started to measure, and the fact that we are discussing those issues here, is a step in the right direction. Thirty minutes is by no means acceptable if you want to sell a service in order to improve it....

In comparing Europe and North America, the process in Europe in commercializing the service started earlier and therefore Europe is a little bit ahead.

● (1205)

The Chair: *Merci*.

Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Bobasch, for joining us here today on a subject that we've worked on for about a year. We've had a variety of presentations.

I want to start out with one thing. You said about inflight security measures—I don't know if you said it, but I have it here—that only in 2005 were strict protocols struck for access to cockpits in the European Union.

Mr. Joram Bobasch: I have to admit that I don't remember.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Okay. But it's a fairly recent development?

Mr. Joram Bobasch: Well, it was not prior to 9/11—

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Okay. Good enough.

Mr. Joram Bobasch: —and then there were steel doors and locked doors.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: You said that you could take out this steel door with your glasses.

Mr. Joram Bobasch: I could try.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: You could try. But I mean...are you satisfied that the protocols now in place for access to cockpits are such that access to cockpits is very unlikely by anyone within the plane? To me it's one of the key elements of security, because it's dealing with the risk. If the risk is taking over the plane or if the risk is simply damaging or hurting one of the attendants or one of the passengers on the plane, two levels of risk are involved. Do you not agree?

● (1210)

Mr. Joram Bobasch: I agree with the fact I can take my glasses and threaten a flight attendant—or a glass or whatever—and stab her and whatever and try to convince her to open the door to the cockpit. If she makes it or doesn't—

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Is it possible for a flight attendant to open the door of the cockpit under the new protocols?

Mr. Joram Bobasch: I don't know.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: You don't know? But this is an essential element of security.

Mr. Joram Bobasch: It is, but we are dealing with the security that is up until the airplane—

Mr. Dennis Bevington: But if you're talking about risk assessment and you don't know whether that door can be opened, then how can you assess the risk of anything that a passenger is taking on a plane?

Mr. Joram Bobasch: Again, I understand your question. The total risk assessment with our—

Mr. Dennis Bevington: You may be protecting your business, but I want to get some answers here. If the business is security, yes, you have to.... But what is the risk when the cockpit doors are locked and barred?

Mr. Joram Bobasch: The question is a fair question. It's a wonderful question. The fact that the cockpit doors should stay locked is not disputable.

The protocols should be such that any threat that happens before the doors shouldn't enable a stewardess or any member of the crew to open the doors. If it is as such, I don't know, because we are not involved in that. We might have an opinion in saying that there should be a protocol. The inflight security measures are the sole responsibility of the airline that operates the inflight process, not the security company or the security regime that does the security for the passengers before they board.

Having said that—

Mr. Dennis Bevington: But—

Mr. Joram Bobasch: Please let me finish. But having said that, if we analyze that scissors or glasses or whatever would enable someone to overcome this kind of a protocol, the protocol should be changed.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: But in order for you to determine what should be looked for on a passenger, you must understand what the risk is on the plane. I'm kind of befuddled by you being the expert on European Union security yet you can't answer this question for me.

Mr. Joram Bobasch: My answer is very simple. We are a commercial security provider. We are providing compliance with the requirements of the regulator, of the government. If the government decides that we have to take off whatever item there is, then we will take it off. This has to be monitored and managed day in and day out. The decision of what to take off is a regulated decision and not that of a private service provider.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Okay.

On another matter, in terms of these wait times at security, what we saw this year was a very bad incident at the Russian airport, in the airport, where we lost many people. The Israelis believe in no waiting; they believe in no congestion at the airport. Do you follow that logic?

Mr. Joram Bobasch: It is, again, the process of the threat assessment. How possible is it, wherever you're doing this assessment, that this threat may happen? It happened in Russia. It happened in Glasgow. In Glasgow, a car full of explosives was driven into the terminal and exploded. I forget the number of casualties. The same thing happened in Madrid in the parking area.

Coming back to Israel, the Israeli threat assessment has a protocol that says cars are inspected in the vicinity of the airport, not while arriving at the airport. So four kilometres before you arrive at the airport, on the highway, you have a kind of checkpoint where they verify whether the car represents a risk or should undergo an inspection. In Israel, this risk exists. In Baghdad, it exists every day, because cars explode every day. How high this risk is here and whether this is an actual risk is up to the regulator to analyze.

In Germany two years ago, a group of so-called homegrown terrorists was preparing bombs from chemicals they bought on the free market. They were detergents. They were caught, luckily, days before execution, but they had exactly the same intention.

It is a question of risk assessment.

● (1215)

The Chair: You have five seconds, so I think I'll go to Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Thank you for coming today. We really appreciate it. I have anticipated this for some period of time. I'm quite excited, because you are a service expert in relation to airports, I understand, and you have some expertise in relation to queueing and efficiencies.

That's what I'd like to concentrate on: productivity and efficiency in our airports. I think that's very important, and I think most Canadians expect us to work on that, especially given some of the statistics we've received from other countries in relation to the throughput in other airports.

I'm going to concentrate a bit on Israel. I had an experience in Israel. I went to Israel with my mom and about 30 Jewish friends from a synagogue in Long Island. I was on a bus. I was coming up to the airport in Tel Aviv, and they stopped us. The military surrounded the bus and we got out. I was the first person. Everybody was about 60 years old or older, so I was the person who got out and did the talking.

I got out and they asked me a few questions. They asked what I did for a living, and I told them that I was a member of Parliament from Canada. Well, they were just pulling out the first suitcase, and when they found that out and got my business card and saw my ID, they put everything back in and said, “Have a nice day”.

Mr. Joram Bobasch: They were nice people.

Mr. Brian Jean: They were nice people. I was quite impressed, because obviously I don't pose a threat, right? You would think that as a member of Parliament of a democracy that believes in the rule of law, I don't pose a threat.

Why can't we do that in this country?

I understand that they have a psychological test they give people every year. In that psychological test, they have a series of 10 or 20 questions, and they exclude almost all of their citizens, all their Israeli citizens. It's something like 90%, I believe.

Now, I received a NEXUS card here a couple of days ago. I must be one of one per cent of one per cent of Canadians who have it, if not fewer. It's very difficult to get. It's not that simple, to be honest, and especially for a guy who travels. I'm a super-elite member. I travel a lot, and it's still quite difficult, or at least cumbersome, to get.

Do you think there's any value in having an exclusion list of people who don't pose a threat and having those people assessed through some sort of psychological test every year? That's my question to you.

Mr. Joram Bobasch: May I answer, Mr. Chairman? We will keep order.

I read through the remarks of Dr. Salter and Rafi Sela, and I believe there is a little bit of a confusion in the understanding of the system, which is the risk-based assessment on what happens in Israeli airports versus other airports.

In Israel the risk assessment by the authorities is basically very simple. One fact is that Tel Aviv has 11 million passengers. You know how many you have in Pearson, so the number of passengers to deal with is completely different. Out of those 11 million, any passenger who is Jewish, serves in the Israeli Army, and has been there represents less of a threat than the others.

So the first step or the first action of their conduct is to verify. Are you one of those? Are you okay? Because if you are okay, they don't need to waste time on you. They need to waste time on the guy with the kaffiyeh on his head and so on and so on, because this is the riskier group. If they have a group of tourists on a bus, they say, “Let's verify that these are very positively oriented tourists and they did not go to visit the Palestinian Authority in order to support the training of the bad guys”.

This is exactly the process that happened to you. The assumption that a member of Parliament in Canada is responsible, with a group of honest-looking people, is a very positive understanding. The process that happened is that they said, “Okay, let's concentrate on the rest”.

● (1220)

Mr. Brian Jean: And that's my question. In Canada we have RCMP officers, obviously, who carry weapons, and they can wander the streets with weapons, and yet when they get to an airport they go through the first primary screening, the secondary screening...they go through everything that everybody else does.

How do we exclude those people? What would your recommendations be to the Government of Canada to exclude people, to work on productivity and efficiency, and at the same time at least maintain that level of security and make sure that the people in that area believe they're secure?

Mr. Joram Bobasch: It's a political decision, not a service-provider decision. If an RCMP officer has been 30 years with the force and is capable of doing everything and is very loyal to the Canadian flag, and if you decide that he is like that, you give the instruction to the authority, to the regulator. You would say, “We would exclude those people because we believe in their integrity in the Canadian society”.

I was a good soldier;I know how to salute. Just give me the instruction and I will do the compliance. It is your decision. You had the wonderful example of NEXUS. NEXUS is an example of this: “Let's verify that you are who you say you are in order to exclude you from the waiting lines, because we don't need to verify that you are good”.

Mr. Brian Jean: Israel, I understand, has a test they apply every year. It's just a self-done test in a computer kiosk. They ask 10 or 20 questions. That's my understanding. Would that be a recommendation as well? To continue monitoring those individuals on a yearly basis...? Obviously we have other cases where there have been military officers, for instance, in the United States, who have caused terrorist activities. So it's not that it can be an exclusive group once you're within that group; you have to continue to monitor those people. Isn't that fair?

Mr. Joram Bobasch: There are two things. First of all, I think the American officers who did killing are individuals that are extraordinary. You cannot say there is a group of people who are officers and let's identify them as individuals so that we could put them under a group—

Mr. Brian Jean: So no matter what happens, you can't eliminate that risk completely. That's what you're saying, because—

Mr. Joram Bobasch: There is no 100% security or 100% risk mitigation anyhow. On the other hand, what Israel developed is similar to the NEXUS card for Israeli citizens entering and leaving the country and bypassing the lines of the border control—these are the lines that you have in the entry—with a fingerprint identification.

The verification is not a 10-question questionnaire; it is actually the renewing of the passport. It goes under the assumption that the administration would allocate and integrate the required information, saying that if you reapply for a passport and you have been behaving badly in between, then we will not authorize you with the easier way to bypass the lines. But this is again increasing the level of service. The moment you have positively identified somebody, he doesn't have to stay in line in order to meet an officer who verifies the same again.

Mr. Brian Jean: Israel also, I understand, has behavioural analysis teams. They train their people in relation to that, so when you get to the airport, if you're sweating or you do something silly, they'll put you in a secondary screening line and give you a little extra attention.

Mr. Joram Bobasch: I have to make a statement, Mr. Chair. I'm not a representative of the Israeli security regime. I'm an executive director in a privately held company.

Mr. Brian Jean: I understand that, sir. It's just that we have world practices to look at and to understand.

Mr. Joram Bobasch: You're referring to the behavioural recognition that exists not only in Israel but also in other countries around the world. Actually, it is a very logical and typical way to do it. If you see somebody sweating, it could be a result of his outrage about whatever, or it could be that it's warm. You want to identify it. In Israel it's very warm all the time. Why is he sweating? Is it the air conditioning or that he's very thrilled with the idea of flying? The same thing applies to any customs controls or any extraordinary situation.

ICTS has been serving American carriers for almost quarter of a century by doing similar observations—I know there is a “p” word I shouldn't use—on all the American carriers' flights from Europe to the United States. One of those observations led to our flagging the shoe bomber.

Do you remember Richard Reid in December 2001? Richard Reid, from his appearance, was looking a little weird. He came with a very small rucksack for a flight from Paris to the States. He was holding a British passport. While being questioned by an ICTS employee and asked why he was using France as an embarkation point, he gave the answer that he used the probability of buying a cheaper ticket.

The reason he was asked was that he was the holder of a British passport. Normally, with all due respect to the love of those two countries in Europe, those who do not speak French do not come and fly from France. I'm trying to be politically correct, as I'm not a politician. He raised the suspicion that he was lying, especially through his appearance, and he was not sweating.

The young lady took the guy to the French authorities, to the gendarmerie, to verify if the British passport he was holding was a genuine passport or a forged passport. As I told you, we're catching a lot of forgeries in Europe. In the time it took the French police to verify the identity and existence of this passport, the flight left. The airline, our client, was very upset that we had kept a passenger who was obviously a holder of a British passport and they rebooked him on the next day's flight.

This was the luck of the story. He got a ticket for the next day's flight and a voucher for the airport hotel. He walked over to the hotel and stayed there. Overnight it rained. When he walked in the next morning on the wet floor at the airport, his soles soaked up water. The procedure with the same lady happened again. He was verified. His passport was checked. We gave the recommendation to the airline not to take him as a passenger because we had a bad feeling, but they made a commercial decision to take the passenger. Due to the fact that his soles were wet, he was unable to set off the bomb. It was luck.

This is the outcome of such a process. Not always are such processes right. Not always do such processes end in success. Not always do you get those wonderful results, but if such a process didn't happen, we would be in a different position.

● (1225)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Byrne.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): ICTS Europe is a company that, if you look at it in its magnitude, is approximately twice the size of the entire department of Transport Canada and it's almost a little better than half the size of the entire Royal Canadian Mounted Police. It's a sizable operation, with operations all over.

I'm curious how you categorize it. It answers to shareholders. You've entered the Canadian market, preliminarily in Burlington. I understand you have a subsidiary in Burlington. I'm assuming that as a private enterprise with expansion interests you have used that sizable force you have to analyze the Canadian security system, in an effort, I would assume, to increase your business profile within Canada. Is that a fair statement to make?

Mr. Joram Bobasch: It is a fair statement to make, but the Canadian market presents an interesting market.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Based on the analysis you've done of the Canadian system, in looking to seek business in the Canadian market, do you have any perspective to offer this committee on what the Canadian system is doing inefficiently or ineffectively that your company would be better able to provide?

Mr. Joram Bobasch: I would divide my answer into two.

As I said before, I believe the Canadian market is undergoing a process that we saw starting in Europe 20 years ago. The reason that it started here was an event that nobody wanted to happen, but sometimes those kinds of events happen and a response is not planned. So you have the recovery phase, which takes several years. Then you have the phase that you're in now, in which you see what you did and how you can do it better.

During the last quarter of a century in Europe, we have gained a lot of experience in managing operational compliance. We have learned to work together with the regulators and to add value in commerce through better service or a better perception of service. In these areas, the Canadian market still has potential in comparison with what we've seen in Europe.

The compliance level stated by the regulator is something that changes on a daily basis, like the policy on liquids and gels, which came into effect overnight, or the decision on February 3 to allow or not to allow additional items on airplanes. It has to be implemented overnight. I believe that ICTS's experience in managing this kind of compliance allows us to say that we have something to contribute on that level by creating or adding value in service.

● (1230)

Hon. Gerry Byrne: What I'm hearing is that you really do not have any advice to give us on improving regulations or the regulatory environment. You are basically a service provider and you do as you are asked, so there is no information that you can provide on how the Canadian regulatory system can be improved.

So what I'll ask now is about the commercial interface. This is a complex, security-based system that's based on intelligence and the garnering of intelligence at airports, on site, and at times off site as well. I want to take the example you just used about the shoe bomber. Why didn't that airline, which is your client, accept your advice?

Mr. Joram Bobasch: Allow me to give you one remark on the role of the service provider. We are not a regulator. We are not political decision-makers. That is your role. We might have an opinion if we're asked whether we think doing this or that is better or worse. But it's only our opinion. We do not instruct. We receive instructions.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: With all due respect, that's what I've asked you. Do you have an opinion on how the Canadian regulatory system can improve? You did not take advantage of that question to answer and provide us with any opinion. So I'm assuming that you don't have an opinion on the Canadian regulatory system.

Mr. Joram Bobasch: My basic response would be that it is good that you have a system that has succeeded in harmonizing all the processes of the past. There is a need for a continuous effort to increase the level of verification so that the risk continues to be mitigated with proper protocols. But this is not our role. This is a general remark.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: To get to the question at hand, then, why didn't your client accept the advice of your company when you suggested that the shoe bomber should not be allowed on the flight?

Mr. Joram Bobasch: I cannot speak for my client, but I can assume that they decided to make this commercial decision to not lose passenger revenue and to take the risk because they got the verification from the French border authorities that the guy was indeed who he was presenting himself to be, which was right. What Richard Reid did was analyze. He did a risk assessment. At that point, after September 11 but before the new legislation, shoes were not taken off and were not screened, apart from the normal screening. He had his bomb installed in his shoe in such a way that he knew that according to the then existing security protocols it would not be found.

● (1235)

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Gaudet.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Could the 9/11 attacks happen again in 2011 with all the security measures we now have?

[*English*]

Mr. Joram Bobasch: Do you mean could a hijacking like the ones that took place on September 11 happen again?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Yes.

[*English*]

Mr. Joram Bobasch: Obviously they could not, for two reasons. One the one hand, the cockpit doors are locked, hopefully for good, and on the other hand, the security protocols that existed prior to September 11 allowed knives on board. If I remember correctly, they were allowed to have knives up to nine centimetres long. The reason for it being nine centimetres was that up to that point you could still stab somebody without killing him. This was the assumption then. This assumption was revoked shortly after that, but those two major risks were mitigated by the existing system.

The question is, what are the risks today and are the systems mitigating all the risks that you perceive today?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: I agree with you, but in 2001, those were American pilots with American planes. Those were not planes from other countries. The planes that hit those targets left from the United States. We are talking about airplanes from American companies. What guarantees do you have that this won't happen again? The cockpit may be closed, securely shut, locked, but if the pilot has control of the airplane, what are you going to do?

[*English*]

Mr. Joram Bobasch: I'm not answering on behalf of the pilot, because this is the pilot's decision, so—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: I am not asking you to answer on behalf of the pilot. Those were four American pilots from American schools who did their pilot training in the United States. And you are telling me that it couldn't happen again. I'm not so sure about that. They were American. Even if they weren't American in origin, it doesn't matter. They were American with American airplanes and with Americans inside. The targets were very specific, and you are telling me that it could not happen again with these same pilots. I am not sure about that, even if the cockpit is locked. We are talking about security. It is all well and good to say we are going to screen people at the airport, or Brian Jean, the chair or myself will go through the checkpoints, but if the security staff does not screen the key players, meaning the pilots, flight attendants and so on, what are we supposed to do? We can say goodbye to security forever.

[*English*]

Mr. Joram Bobasch: If I recollect correctly, on September 11, 19 people succeeded in entering cockpits to hijack the airplanes and fly the airplanes. Against this modus operandi, one of the measures was to close the door of the cockpit and close it in such a way that an entry would not be possible. Now, the question is whether that is technically possible or whether you could convince the stewardess to open the door for you.

It is probably very hard, but wherever the door is, it is there to be opened. There is always a risk that somehow you would be able to open the door of a cockpit, of a nuclear plant, or of a meeting room... it doesn't matter.

I understand that I don't understand the question—

● (1240)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: You are saying that 19 people got into the cockpit, but that's not what happened everywhere. The planes that crashed into the World Trade Center in New York had left the airport 20 or 30 minutes earlier. Those people did not have time to take everyone by storm. I think it was the pilot himself who flew directly into the World Trade Center. If I remember correctly, that is what happened. You are talking about the plane that was headed for the Pentagon, the headquarters of the American defence department. But in this case, fights broke out on the plane. To my knowledge, there were no other fights elsewhere. That's my opinion.

[*English*]

Mr. Joram Bobasch: As far as I remember, some of those 19 people took flying lessons in Florida. They upgraded their capabilities in order to fly those commercial airplanes. What exactly happened in the cockpit, we don't know, but they hijacked the airplane.

I don't know if they forced the pilot who was sitting in the cockpit to fly the airplanes into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon or if they replaced them. As far as I remember from the media and the press, some of those 19 people, led by Mohamed Atta, took flying lessons at flying schools in Florida.

By the way, if you want to take flying lessons in Florida today, you have to undergo something like NEXUS registration to verify your personality and so on.

The Chair: Mr. Mayes.

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Bobasch. I'm really enjoying your answers to these questions.

As a private provider of security, there must be some sort of a relationship between you and the policy-makers, the government. With regard to that relationship, do you have input into levels of security and techniques to help the policy-makers make those decisions that give you direction in providing security?

Mr. Joram Bobasch: Obviously, when you have worked for 25 years together—I have spent over a third of a century in the field of security—you get to know people. This is the wonderful part of getting to know people worldwide: you start to talk.

I know that nowadays talking has become very virtual, but on a personal level you get to know that it is human to make mistakes. You try to learn from your mistakes. You try to learn from the mistakes of other people. You exchange views because you want to achieve the goal of securing those flights.

Obviously, you are maintaining a relationship, sometimes on the level of client and supplier, and sometimes on the level of getting together in conferences—although there is no commercial relationship in getting to know people, yes?

Mr. Colin Mayes: There was some discussion from Mr. Jean about what I'd call perimeter security. We had a witness from the Israeli airport security who mentioned that as an issue. I am wondering if that is a common practice in Europe around international airports.

Mr. Joram Bobasch: Definitely. It's not just international airports. Every airport, according to the existing legal system, has to have a definition of the perimeter, of what is regarded as the perimeter, the clean area within the perimeter, who has the access, and at what levels. There is a full set of rules and protocols on how it has to be done. The monitoring of this is very important, as are the training of the employees and the drilling of the employees.

One of the biggest problems we are confronted with on a daily basis is that we have 13,000 screeners, and each of those screeners is sitting in front of a monitor and seeing pictures that are changing every seven seconds. How do you ensure, at 4 o'clock in the morning, or at midday, or at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, that the employees are responding at the same level of expectation in a continuous way? The same thing applies to perimeter security.

We are actually at the beginning of the intense part of it because there are a lot of goods entering the airport through the gates. Just think of the deliveries to an airport. Also, every airport is a construction site. There is no airport in the world that is not building a new terminal or a new runway. We're talking about huge construction sites worldwide. Every truck could be loaded not only with metal, but with dangerous items. It is a very valid point and issue.

● (1245)

Mr. Colin Mayes: I want to get back to international airports and domestic airports. The challenge in Canada is that we're twice the size and have a third of the population density. We have our international airports in our urban areas and we also have rural airports. Should they have the same level of security? Do the airlines within a particular country in Europe have the same level of security protocol as, for instance, what I would call an international airport?

Mr. Joram Bobasch: I had the honour to give a presentation in front of the security council of the Canadian airports committee, the CAC. We talked about threat assessment. We were looking for an example that was not Pearson or Vancouver or Montreal. We were looking for an example of the threat in a remote airport. I believe we picked Calgary or a smaller airport.

We looked at something that is public information. In Canada or North America, you have this wonderful thing of having aircraft spotters. People sit at the end of the runway and register the tail numbers of the airplanes. They watch and take pictures and so on.

We found out—I think it was in Calgary—that there is a website where people exchange information about how well you can see the wonderful airplanes that are landing when they're using runway so-and-so, and how, if you go to the hotel at the end of the runway and you go to the third floor and open the window, you can see it from 100 metres away. That's wonderful information for spotters.

But if I had bad intentions, I would place on the third floor of this hotel an RPG or another rocket in order to tear down.... That's if I had bad intentions.

The threat assessment is there. The threat is there. How to mitigate it is something that has to be regulated. It cannot come down to whether I have the funds to do it, yes or no, especially when you're talking about an emerging level of threat that is almost uncontrollable. If 10 years ago Mohamed Atta needed probably 15 months to train his people to fly airplanes, nowadays in the Facebook generation it takes maybe days, or hours, or seconds to initiate something that comes up in a revolution in a country, a political revolution.

Saying that the threat in a smaller remote airport is not as big as it is at a bigger airport is maybe a nice statement if you perceive only the smaller airports. But the people who fly from that small airport are coming to the bigger airport and are transit passengers in the bigger airport. Then they have free access to the next flight.

The Chair: Thank you.

I want to offer one more short round of questions. Would anybody would like to take it?

Mr. Bevington, would you like a couple of minutes?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Yes.

I want to get a sense from you of the relative cost of our system in Canada in comparison to European countries, where they meet the ICAO minimum standards. What's the relative cost in Canada compared to other systems?

Mr. Joram Bobasch: I have to admit that I have no idea of what the cost here is.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: We have a $25 per passenger charge for international passengers. I think it's $12 for domestic passengers. Some of the evidence was presented to us. How does that line up with some of the airports in Europe that have similar systems?

● (1250)

Mr. Joram Bobasch: I don't have the data in front of me. I can say that from my own experience as a passenger, I see the security fees on my tickets, and some of them are higher and some of them are lower.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Are we in the gradient range?

Mr. Joram Bobasch: I don't have the official figures to compare that.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Jean, very briefly.

Mr. Brian Jean: Yes, I will be very brief, Mr. Chair. Well, maybe I won't be quite so brief, but cut me off if it gets too long.

I built a car wash in 2001. Every time I go to a car wash, I look around and say, “I would do that differently or that differently and be more effective”. I can't help myself. I can't even get a car washed without pointing out three or four things that are wrong with the car wash even though it's probably better than mine.

You must fly a lot. You go through all of our airport security. You must see a lot of things that you would suggest we do differently. You're a service expert, right? Why don't you give me the top five that you would recommend?

Mr. Joram Bobasch: Go fishing.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Brian Jean: Sold. That's one of my favourite activities. I'd be happy to.

Mr. Joram Bobasch: I think there are two areas that still need to be improved and put on the agenda in the North American environment. One area—

Mr. Brian Jean: For Canada in particular, if you don't mind.

Mr. Joram Bobasch: One is the service element. Obviously, commercial security service at the airports is still perceived as being an obstacle, and this is a perception that has to be changed and analyzed. That being said, with the assumption that the regulators set the standards, they are the right standards, they're not disputable, and so on, the way it's being delivered still has to be upgraded.

If the measurement is waiting lines and you compare it to Walt Disney, where you have the most impatient society of people waiting in lines—the kids—they're willing to wait in line because they know they're achieving their goal. They're doing it somehow better there, because we don't have the same perception with three billion other people. So this is the first area: the perception of service.

Area two is still the issue of cargo screening. It has been mandated to happen, and there is still a large debate about what should happen. What are the regulations? What are the protocols and so on? You're virtually stripping the passengers, on the one hand, and on the other hand, 67% of the air cargo is being flown on passenger airplanes and being screened by the paperwork. I don't need to tell you how easy it is to prepare paperwork.

The car wash was one of the represented solutions two years ago. They said, “If we move the cargo through like the car-wash industry, we'll able to screen it”. But again, as with the whole-body scanners, there is no technical solution yet to mitigate the risks and identify the components of prohibited and dangerous items in cargo.

So the hit list is not five items: it's two items. One is service on the level of the passenger and the other one is cargo.

Mr. Brian Jean: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you to our guest. Hopefully you'll see what you've offered appear somewhere in a future report on airport and air safety from this committee. Thank you very much for your time today.

Mr. Joram Bobasch: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks to everybody for the questions. I hope you don't mind my blunt answers.

The Chair: Thank you.

Just for the information of the committee, we are asking that members submit their amendments to Bill C-33 by Monday, March 7, no later than midnight. We'll see you this afternoon at 3:30. Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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