Transportation Security Agency

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Introduction

After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the United States Congress turned its focus towards tightening airport security by voting to standardize airport security nationwide. Before 9/11, airport security was the responsibility of airports and contracted security services utilizing unskilled passenger and baggage screener personnel. Screeners where overworked and received a minimum wage average salary. Many mistakes caused by inadequate employee security training created numerous security vulnerabilities throughout the aviation industry. After the 9/11 attack, a federal government controlled, stricter, and more sweeping passenger and baggage screening replaced this flawed system. With the aid of taxpayer funds, aviation security became part of one agency, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) (Conti, Shay & Hartzog, 2014).

The TSA handles all passenger and baggage security at all US airports (CRS, 2001). The federal government tried to minimize the effects of potential catastrophic security incidents by tightening homeland defenses by spending an estimated $55 billion on homeland defense programs (GAO, 2008). The shift from private to federal control of airport security has led to improvements in three significant areas of airport security: Employee training, technology, and standardized procedures. The transfer of airport security from the privatized system to the government-controlled system has so far prevented a repeat of September 2011, but this new system has caused negative press and public uproars about personal privacy issues (GAO, 2008).

Discussion

In November 2001, President Bush signed the ATSA into law creating the TSA as the new federal government agency in charge of airport security (CRS, 2001). With the TSA as lead, aviation security enhancement was standardized. Today, only one agency is responsible for all screening procedures along with comprehensive passenger and employee background checks. TSA control has provided standardized security regulations, procedures, processes, requirements, and training at all airports (GAO, 2008).

The TSA required and established the same security standards at all airports under their control. The ATSA requires TSA inspections of all checked baggage with the use of X-rays, hand searches, sniffer-dogs, as well as other technological systems. Since 2002, all checked baggage has been inspected utilizing explosives detection technology installed in most major airports. Prior to 2002, less than 10 percent of checked bags were screened for explosives (GAO, 2008). Since its enactment, the ATSA limited screening to uniformed, licensed government TSA agents.

Legislators, through ATSA amendments, directed the TSA to develop procedures to conduct all airfreight inspections, perform intensive background checks on foreign flight school students, and impose a six-month ban on small planes flying over major public events. Since the ATSA became law, TSA hired more licensed uniformed personnel to tighten airport security. Approximately 32,000 security screeners have been placed into the system operating new screening equipment enforcing ATSA security mandates (GAO, 2008). These employees are trained, tested and certified regularly across the country and receive official certifications.

After the 9/11 Commission final report was released in 2004 it was determined that ineffective screening did not play a major role in the September 11 attacks (9/11 Report, 2004).

However, other studies revealed significant amounts of passenger screening vulnerabilities were detected at all major US Airports. The US Congress acted quickly on these findings and decided to federalize the entire security screening process thru passage of the ATSA (CRS, 2001). The creation of the TSA gave one agency control to oversee and overhaul the entire passenger and luggage-screening system, focus on better screener training, create an environment to help improve job satisfaction, and influence screeners to be more dedicated and improve retention (Betts, 2002).

In order to achieve the ATSA mandates, the TSA implemented several major changes. The first change was to improve employees' capabilities. Before federal control, the quality of training passenger and baggage screeners received was vague and very questionable. Under the new ATSA guidelines, TSA employees, responsible for security, must undergo thorough background checks, including credit history and previous criminal activity (CRS, 2001). Other requirements included being a US citizen, passing random drug tests, and passing the Federal Civil Aviation Security Screener's Course and certification test (GAO, 2001). Additionally, all employees must undergo a far more intensive training program than was previously required (GAO, 2008). TSA screeners are required to engage in 40 hours of classroom training, and 60 hours of supervised on-the-job training prior to operating on their own (GAO, 2008). Since 2002, a total of 44,000 federally certified passenger screeners are now at some 424 airports across the nation (GAO, 2008).

The TSA placed great emphasis on screener certification training, professionalism, and potential career advancement to ensure new employees remain dedicated to securing America's airports (GAO, 2008). The new federal screeners, one third of who are military veterans and another 15 percent selected from private security agencies, are enticed to remain with the TSA

with modest pay and benefits packages. TSA security employees earn between $25,000 and

$35,000 a year (GAO, 2008). This is a considerable jump from the previous minimum wage

private screener salary and is one reason why screeners remain employed with the TSA (GAO,

2008). The main strategy for the pay and benefits package was to motivate employees to become

more dedicated to their vital security tasks and retaining highly trained security screeners

providing continuity throughout the entire security system (Betts, 2002).

Conclusion

All in all, it can be said that in addition to screener training, airport security has

substantially improved through the intense intelligence gathering training provided to the TSA

employees. It is mandatory for all TSA agents to now receive thorough and intense training in

utilizing human intelligence to track down leads and threats.

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