

THE IMPACT AND HISTORY OF BOMB SCARES ON SECURITY MEASURES IN AIRPORT. BOMB SCARES STATISTICS

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Abstract:

Bomb scares in airports have become a common occurrence in recent years, causing widespread panic, disruption of air traffic, and economic losses. Despite the efforts of airport security personnel and law enforcement agencies, bomb scares continue to pose a significant threat to public safety and security. This paper aims to review the literature on bomb scares in airports, focusing on their causes, consequences, and prevention strategies. The paper examines various studies and reports on bomb scares in airports, including case studies, statistical analyses, and surveys.

The paper concludes by highlighting the importance of effective risk communication, cooperation among stakeholders, and the use of advanced technologies in preventing and responding to bomb scares in airports.

Key words: Study of incident cases, reading of cockpit voice transcripts, checklists, abnormal and emergency procedures, aviation, safety, emergency, safety performance.

As a college student, you may come across the term bomb threat or a bomb scare. It refers to a warning that an explosive or incendiary device will be detonated to cause property damage, death, injuries and/or fear even if no such device exists. These threats were commonly used during the American Civil Rights Movement where leaders like Martin Luther King Jr received multiple bomb threats during their speeches and schools attempting integration faced opposition resulting in numerous bomb threats broadcasted on TV and radio stations.

The motives behind these attacks include humour, self-assertion, anger manipulation aggression hate devaluation omnipotence fantasy psychotic distortion ideology retaliation creating chaos amongst others which can be speculative based on personal emotions involved in making such claims. Some of these warnings are not mere pranks but rather tactics employed by criminals committing other crimes such as extortion, arson or aircraft hijacking.

Bomb threats stem from political or religious ideologies, such as criticism of political parties, animal testing, abortion, eco-terrorism and nuclear power. These aims

include drawing attention to certain causes or creating unrest among those who oppose the threatener's views. The targets range from houses of worship to research facilities and medical establishments with some motivated by race.

Bomb threats made as part of extortion schemes demand some form of bribe, payment, or incentive to prevent the use of a bomb. The payment can be made in the form of cash, Bitcoin, or forcing the victim to adhere to demands.

Because of the potential for loss of life, injury, and property damage of a bomb detonation, bomb threats are treated as realistic and maliciously intended by authorities until proven otherwise. Bomb threats made as jokes or pranks, especially those made against schools, cause thousands of dollars in law enforcement costs, government resources, and lost educational time annually. These threats may be made as distractions or disruptions, forcing school officials to cancel or postpone planned activities such as exams. Related to an actual bomb is a so-called "hoax device", designed to cause a reasonable person to assume the item was a truly destructive device capable of causing injury or death.

False flag bomb threats are made to create the appearance of a specific group or person being responsible for an activity to disguise the true perpetrators.

It can happen as part of politically-motivated operations, for example when it was reportedly used as a pretext by the Belarusian government to divert Ryanair Flight 4978 to Minsk in order to arrest opposition figure Raman Pratasevich. As a result the nation was accused of committing state terrorism.

Bomb threats are often made toward educational institutions, typically by students who either feel under stress due to academic pressure or who harbour angry or violent emotions toward the school community or members of it. In the United States, roughly 5% of bomb threats targeted schools, and bomb threats made against schools have increased by 33% since 2014. The penalty for bomb threats on a school campus is usually immediate expulsion.

In 2013, final exams at Harvard University were disrupted by an anonymous threat of a "shrapnel bomb" that turned out to have been authored by 20-year-old student Eldo Kim who hoped to avoid taking his final exam. Kim agreed to pay restitution to law enforcement agencies, complete a rehabilitative "diversionary program," remain under home confinement for several months, and perform community service.

Bomb threats against political figures such as the President of the United States, occur regularly and are illegal under the United States Code Title 18, Section 871 law.

The British royal family, specifically Queen Elizabeth, has faced bomb threats based on blame for the actions of the British government. Celebrities may also be the victims of bomb threats, especially those who have expressed political views, or those who are leaders of political causes. Author Salman Rushdie and his publisher faced

multiple bomb threats from Islamic fundamentalist groups because of his controversial book *The Satanic Verses*, which was interpreted by these groups as opposing Muslim ideology.

Many buildings are the recipients of bomb threats, including transportation hubs such as airports and train stations, power plants, medical facilities, and government buildings such as the Pentagon, the US Embassy, and the Casa Rosada. Among these, airports, city halls, and courthouses are most likely to experience repeated bomb threats. Among bomb threats related to transportation, threats and false information knowingly provided about bombs on aeroplanes have the most severe response.

Private institutions and businesses, including banks, department stores, malls, casinos, restaurants, manufacturing plants, and truck stops, have been the recipients of bomb threats for various reasons. Some bomb threats are made because of ideological differences or opposition to the mission or perceived mission of the institution, such as those made against Planned Parenthood and abortion clinics, news organisations such as CNN, or nuclear facilities. From 1983 to 1992, the World Trade Center experienced roughly 350 bomb threats and scares for various reasons.

A majority of bomb threats are perpetrated by middle-aged men who make these threats via a telephone call. Different types of offenders tend to call the target directly on a public phone to demand money, call directly on a personal line because of resentment, or call emergency service lines and make threats for personal entertainment.

Bomb threats may also be made by text message, as in the case of a March 2004 message to a private operator sending a warning of bombs in five Washington, D.C. schools, and February 2014 messages to school employees of Ateneo de Manila University.

Bomb threats may be made in letters or notes, delivered either personally or through the mail system. Packages intended to mimic or represent bombs, including backpacks, luggage, bags, or attache cases, even if they may not have the capability of exploding because of poor construction or intentional choices, are still treated as potential explosives, as in the case of 13 devices mailed to various politicians and opponents of Donald Trump.

Electronic bomb threats may be made over websites, email, or social media, as in the case of the emailed wave of 2018 Bitcoin bomb threats in the United States and Canada. A series of mail bombs sent to celebrities based on their political ideologies was found to have been preceded by threats on Twitter.

They can also be made face-to-face.

Many activities treated as bomb threats do not explicitly state an intent to set off an explosive; nevertheless, they convey through context or action that a threat is being made. Some actions may indicate an intent to bomb, such as parking a truck outside an

abortion clinic, after a similar bombing made by the same vehicle. In other scenarios, a message mentioning bombs may be interpreted as a threat based on context, such as an email to a school principal reading "bomb," a statement that a bomb exists in a specific location, the expression of a desire to build a bomb a description of a bomb that was placed, or other communications.

Most bomb threats are false alarms which do not involve actual explosives, only the incitement of fear. There are more bomb threats than incidents, with only 14 of 1,055 school incidents recorded from 1990 to 2002 being preceded by threats. According to the Hunter-Howler threat dynamic, the group of people who make bomb threats is largely separate from those who attempt a real bombing, which typically occurs without warning.

Standard procedure is usually to take all threats seriously because civilians are usually threatened by them if valid as well as the community, and arrests may be made even for bomb threats made falsely as in most jurisdictions even hoaxes are a crime. Signs that a threat is legitimate include an out-of-place object found, a motive or specific targets being stated, and multiple calls or specific threats being made.

Police and bomb disposal professionals are typically alerted to respond to bomb threat incidents to assess and mitigate potential harm. Schools and government organisations offer instructions and sometimes training for both bomb prevention planning and response to assist those facing bomb threats. Organisations involved in responding to a bomb threat may also include anti-terrorism government agencies, fire departments, and other emergency services.

The decision to evacuate an area or building, depending on the perceived reliability of the threat, may be made by local controlling authorities or those in charge of the targeted facility based on advice from bomb disposal experts. When a large facility is involved, it can be very difficult and time-consuming to ensure the absence of any bomb or other hazardous device or substance. A search is conducted for out-of-place packages that have features such as unusual shapes, sounds, smells, leakage, or electrical components. Bomb-sniffing dogs may be used as part of this search. Forensic evidence and law enforcement searches are then used to attempt to locate the perpetrator.

While the terms "bomb threat" and "bomb scare" are often used interchangeably, a bomb threat in the legal context is typically in the form of a statement, or some "communicated intent to inflict harm," whereas a "bomb scare" refers to situations of imminent risk, such as the discovery of a suspicious bag. These are both distinct from false statements knowingly made about bombs, which are sometimes also criminalised.

Some statutory definitions include the threatened use, release or placement of other harmful agents, such as poisons, biological pathogens, radioactive materials, or even a dangerous weapon (e.g., aboard an airliner). Other statutes enhance the penalties

for threats made against specific places or persons (e.g. government facilities or dignitaries), and the actual possession of harmful devices or agents. Prosecution of making a bomb threat hinges only on the victim's reasonable belief of the threat's veracity rather than the actual existence of a dangerous device.

A total of 1536 bomb threat incidents took place in the US in 2016, 254 of which were made against businesses and 186 of which were made to residences. Criminal statutes typically dictate severe penalties. For example, in the United States, Massachusetts provides for penalties of up to 20 years in prison, up to \$50,000 fine, and restitution for the costs of the disruption. New York law makes it a "Class E Felony ... to issue a false bomb threat directed toward a school in New York State." Even a false bomb threat has a maximum fine of \$5,000 and up to 5 years in prison. In Orange County in North Carolina, a person may face "a felony charge, a 365-day suspension, revocation of his or her driver's licence, and a civil lawsuit of up to \$25,000."

The current federal law regarding bomb threats applies to a person who "threatens by any means the placement or setting of a weapon of mass destruction." Although there is some contention as to whether the law is overly broad, some current statutes making bomb threats illegal do not define a "threat," as a "true threat", meaning that the intent to use an actual bomb, the existence of a target, or the ability to convince the recipient that a bomb exists, is not relevant. This is because verbal acts which inherently cause panic are not protected under Freedom of speech. However, other sentencing guidelines apply only to "defendants whose conduct evidenced an intent to carry out the threat"

Bomb threats are likely influenced by the power of suggestion and mass media, with threats likely to be made against targets with recent media coverage. Analysis suggests bomb threats against nuclear energy facilities tend to follow greater publicity of nuclear power problems. In the 6 months after the 1999 Columbine High School massacre, there were a reported 5,000 bomb threats made against schools, with hundreds more made every year. Before 1999, there were roughly 1 to 2 threats a year, but by May 1999 a Gallup poll showed one fifth of teenage students experiencing a bomb threat evacuation. Because of copycat trends, some schools are moving toward policies of immediate criminal action against students caught making such threats, regardless of motivation.

The aviation industry has been targeted in bombings and bomb threats since the 1930s. Motivations have ranged from religious extremism to insurance fraud to political assassinations. But the Belarusian government's recent use of a false bomb threat to arrest a political dissident travelling onboard was the first time a national government had employed such tactics.

Ryanair flight FR4978 was travelling from Greece to Lithuania on 23 May when Belarusian fighter jets intercepted the aeroplane, forcing it to land in Minsk. According

to Michael O’Leary, the pilot, Minsk air traffic control had warned him that they had received a credible threat from Hamas – the Gaza-based militant organisation – that a bomb planted on board the plane would detonate if the aircraft entered Lithuanian airspace, or attempted to land at Vilnius Airport. Shortly after its emergency landing in Minsk, Belarusian authorities boarded the flight and arrested the dissident Belarusian journalist, Roman Protasevich, and his partner, who remain in custody.

European Union leaders condemned the clearly fabricated threat – the bomb threat came 24 minutes after the Minsk control tower alerted the Ryanair crew – but it has had a widespread impact on the aviation sector. On 4 June, the EU banned all Belarusian carriers from its airspace and airports. The European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) also issued a directive to ban all aircraft from EU member states from flying over Belarusian airspace or landing on its territory. In response, Russia temporarily banned all EU flights that circumvent Belarusian airspace. This marks the first time that the rules and regulations for airline safety have been used for political ends, both by the Belarusian government in using a bomb threat, and punitively by the EU.

BOMB HOAXES: RARELY A SERIOUS THREAT

The political motivation behind the bomb threat that forced flight FR4978 to land is an outlier, and bomb threats against airliners are typically made for far less nefarious reasons. Motives for bomb threats may vary considerably from criminal motives to an ill-judged hoax call. While this is certainly a relief from a passenger safety perspective, bomb threats can lead to significant disruptions for travellers, divert important security resources at airports, and cost airlines tens of thousands of dollars. Because the consequences of a real detonation are so disastrous, airlines have to take any threat seriously, no matter how spurious they turn out to be. For example, on 4 May 2020, an airline passenger attempted to delay a flight he was late for by calling in a bomb threat. The hoax cost the airline approximately £30,000 (USD 41,700) and resulted in a three-hour delay to flights, as the aircraft was evacuated and all 147 passengers had to undergo additional security checks.

PEACE OF MIND AT A COST

Investigations into bomb threats often take several hours to complete, and in some instances, may require the full or partial evacuation of the entire airport. On 25 May 2021, police evacuated several terminals at the Manchester-Boston Regional Airport in the United States after airport officials received an anonymous bomb threat. Police and K9 units evacuated several terminals and conducted a sweep of the airport and the surrounding area. Two inbound planes with passengers on board were held on the tarmac for the duration of the sweep, and passengers could only disembark two hours later.

Bomb threats can often require officials to mobilise vast airport security resources. After the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, the aviation sector underwent a security and procedural overhaul to mitigate the threat of future attacks. These procedural overhauls have resulted in authorities taking each security threat seriously, even if they receive several non-credible threats in short succession. Between 26 June and 2 July 2015, a Canadian airliner was forced to ground five flights after it received anonymous threats targeting specific flights, all of which turned out to be hoaxes.

During one of these events on 29 June, six passengers were injured when the crew decided to use the evacuation slides to quickly evacuate passengers after a domestic flight from Edmonton to Toronto was diverted to Winnipeg. The security threat caused significant travel disruptions as all passengers stayed in Winnipeg overnight and were only able to continue their flight to Toronto the next morning. While the airliner felt there was no real credibility to the threats, a full investigation was launched into each incident. To date nobody has been charged for this particular incident, though in most cases the perpetrators are arrested.

Balancing an appropriate response to bomb threats with limiting the disruption to passengers and airlines is an ongoing challenge. But as individual hoax callers can be brought to book more readily than states, airlines will hope that the Belarusian incident is an isolated one.

A PERSISTENT THREAT

Although the Ryanair flight FR4978 incident was an outlier, airlines and governments will need to maintain a unified front in denouncing such tactics, while also focusing on regaining consumer confidence if they hope to facilitate a strong recovery in airline travel post pandemic. A consistently robust response to such incidents can go a long way in deterring similar occurrences in future. However, the crisis and its aftermath – particularly Russia’s countermeasures against the EU – have also shown that not all states are ready to play by the same rules, leaving airlines and travellers vulnerable to potential future disruptions.

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