

Canadian and German airport security provides Taliban context

By Bob Bergen

As the New Democratic Party and Liberal leadership hopefuls seek to grab headlines by questioning whether the Canadian Forces ought to be in Afghanistan, there is a risk terrorism-related issues that affect us all may be drowned out by the din.

Indeed, Canadians may be getting so inured to the sheer nonsense spouted by those like NDP leader Jack Layton who would invite Taliban leaders to peace talks that they no longer give second thoughts to the threats to civil liberties and financial and social costs that the war on terrorism has imposed.

For example, airport security is not only an inconvenience that literally eats up days of our business and holiday travel time, it has resulted in hundreds of millions of dollars spent on research, screening tools, bomb-detection devices and security personnel around the world.

An entirely appropriate question political leaders ought to be asking is: Do those expensive and time-consuming enhanced security measures actually work?

The answer to that question – discovered during a trip to Europe last week which allowed this writer to compare the security measures at the airports in Calgary and Frankfurt, Germany – is not at all comforting.

It is an absolute that Canadian airport security in the wake of the London plot to detonate improvised explosive devices on up to 10 aircraft has resulted in much higher passenger screening in Canada than before.

Airport security personnel now look for forbidden beverages, puddings, hair gels, lip glosses, creams, lotions and the like in carry on baggage to prevent explosives from being mixed and detonated in mid-flight.

In addition, all passengers must remove their belts while, some – but not all – are required to remove their shoes before walking through metal detectors.

But, as Canadian security measures go, they are relatively lax compared to the airport security precautions at Frankfurt.

Understandably, German security personnel have good reason to fear the possibility of terrorist attacks against airplanes after the arrest in late August of two men suspected of placing suitcases with liquid bombs on regional trains in northern Germany.

As a result, the security screening is more than double what Canadians must endure at home.

At the entrance to the departure concourse, garbage pails were overflowing with discarded beverage containers, a precursor of what was to follow.

After their passports were checked, in addition to emptying their pockets, all passengers had to remove their shoes and belts.

All passengers were subjected to a police-style body frisk if the metal detector they passed through went off.

This passenger was subjected to a body frisk after the metal detector beeped.

Passengers were also required to allow invasive inspection of their carry on baggage if required.

But, what happened next was illuminating.

My jacket was missing and the only place it could possibly be was in a restaurant outside the secure passenger area.

In order to find it, I had to leave the secure area through the baggage retrieval and customs area as if I had just arrived.

Having done that – and luckily finding my jacket – I had to go through the security check point a second time.

After I had emptied my pockets and had taken off my belt and shoes at a different inspection point, I passed through the metal detector.

It didn't go off and I was spared a second frisking. That raised the question why the second metal detector didn't go off like the first.

After the initial security check, passengers then passed through a second security inspection point at the entrance to the concourse that took them to their flights' departure lounges.

Their pockets were emptied again and their shoes and belts were removed. Their carry-on luggage went through a second X-ray machine and they passed through a second metal detector.

Amazingly, in my flight's departure lounge afterward, one nearby female passenger nonchalantly pulled a

beverage container out of her nap sack. When asked how it managed to pass through security, she replied she had forgotten it was even there. Others also had their own drink containers.

Then, another woman pulled lip gloss from her carry on and giggled as she applied it.

It was disquieting to think that if they could get banned material through *two* inspection points in some of the most rigorous anti-terrorism screening in the world, surely determined terrorists could get them through there, too – not to mention less robust security elsewhere.

All this provides context for learning, upon return to Canada, that NDP Leader would invite the Taliban to peace talks.

Can Jack Layton not connect the dots and grasp that it was the Taliban which harboured Al Qaeda in Afghanistan; that it was Al Qaeda that struck on 9/11 in 2001 when 24 Canadians were among thousands of Americans killed in the terrorists' airline attacks in New York and Washington?

Doesn't he know that the war against terrorism affects every Canadian who boards an airplane anywhere in the world today and who knows when or where terrorists will strike next?

Jack Layton should forget about talking to the Taliban. Instead, he might give some thought to airport security and supporting the brave Canadians taking the fight to the Taliban insurgents and their Al-Qaeda supporters in Afghanistan.

I know he won't, but he should.

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