

# Endangerment of Flight Operations by Protesters

## BACKGROUND

Recent years have seen a very concerning increase in the number of incidents linked to the intentional disruption of flight operations by protesters breaching airport perimeters and sometimes damaging aircraft and/or airport equipment. Examples include covering aircraft with paint, flying drones in final approach paths and occupying aprons.

Most of these incidents have been largely harmless to people, causing only economic consequences. IFALPA, IFATCA, and IBAC are concerned that some of these actions could pose risks to flight safety and potentially result in serious injuries or a catastrophic event.

## THREAT IDENTIFICATION

Establishing measures to prevent these disruptions has proven challenging, and available intelligence on these groups is often limited. Individuals protesting may come from a variety of cultural and social backgrounds and act for a range of motivations, including political, religious, social, environmental, and/or personal reasons. They may be affiliated with organized groups that provide financial or logistical support or act alone with minimal connections. Of particular concern, they may also be employed in the aviation industry and share insider knowledge.

## EXPOSING VULNERABILITIES

As shown by the multiple events involving breaches of airport perimeters and Security Restricted Areas (SRAs), protesters have managed to circumvent security measures to achieve their goals. In doing so, they have exposed weaknesses in aviation security systems that could in turn be exploited by other groups for criminal or terrorist purposes.

## CURRENT MITIGATING MEASURES

Airports have generally been responding to breaches of their perimeter by stopping operations, sometimes for many hours, leading to significant disruption. However, closing an airport to counter protester actions is never a desirable solution and could

potentially create an emergency situation. In most cases, flight crews are not briefed on the reason for the airport closure and are simply asked to divert.

## POSITION

IFALPA, IFATCA, and IBAC believe that the best line of defence against the endangerment of flight operations by protesters is to prevent them from accessing Security Restricted Areas in the first place. Legislation should provide an effective deterrence, and States should establish and implement regulations, practices (such as regular assessment of airport perimeter protection) and appropriate penalties for offenders.

Awareness campaigns should be organized with the aim of educating the public at large as to the risks and implications of breaching the airport perimeter.

IFALPA, IFATCA, and IBAC further believe that any action by any person such as protesters that jeopardizes the safety of aircraft should be classified as a "serious incident" (as per the ICAO Annex 13 definition) and be subjected to a thorough investigation by the relevant Authorities. If security infrastructure has been impacted, such actions should be considered an "act of unlawful interference" as per ICAO Annex 17 and handled accordingly.