By Raoul Sherrard

Air travel is the most visual aspect of international terrorism. It is one which we see most often in the media and provides the most tangible evidence for the threats that may face UK citizens as they pass through customs. In comparison to most of the work done by counterterrorism forces it is much easier to look at the success rate of packages making onto planes and the ensuing chaos in the aviation industry. In this respect the Yemeni printer cartridge bomb threats have been reported to show how terrorists have adapted and challenged our increased security by utilising unassuming office parcels.

Thankfully the response was quick enough to defuse the bombs before they exploded, with unofficial reports of 17 minutes left circulating as if from a movie scene. The governments involved in defusing the plot have subsequently banned cartridges over
 435g
, along with cargo from Yemen and Somalia. Yet this is a surreal reaction when one considers that thousands of tonnes are being transported through numerous circulating routes at this moment in time, often stopping, refuelling, and shifting through several dozen trade routes. Do we expect others attempting to replicate this plot to fail to take into account the new weight restrictions? Or that new extra screening will result in increased vigilance throughout these networks?

In the same circumstances x - ray machines which take full 'naked images' in combination with stricter and more invasive body searches are being routinely used to prevent would be hijackers. The inconvenience of this most vivid and public act of security is tolerated in the knowledge that few of us would travel on planes where no security was in place if given the choice. We would rather feel better with some action being taken, no matter the effectiveness, than none at all. Yet in Israel, the long lines of passengers that these searches cause have provided opportunities for terrorists to detonate explosives.

It is difficult to argue that new technology has made passenger travel objectively safer. What we see is described best by Schneier in Beyond Fear and as a mere ' security theatre '. Airport security is for the most part a play, undertaken more for the benefit of the passengers than the security forces. We are encouraged to be involved to make us and those who are responsible for us feel as if they have taken every possible avenue, trading inconvenience for increased safety.
So what is the answer to this problem if current measures are not enough? How much more

time, resources and manpower would be needed to stop terrorists with access to a cargo company and an ink jet cartridge from bringing down an aircraft? The truth is that this is largely impossible to gauge given that every year 80 million tonnes of cargo and 4.8 billion passengers make trips around the world.

Security is subjective in the same way that you cannot ask an insurer to protect you against all acts that could ever happen; neither can you make air travel impregnable against terrorist attacks. Furthermore, security measures are inevitably brought in to question after they fail to do their job effectively. Critics would then probably claim that the expense and inconvenience was utterly wasteful and better spent elsewhere.

We cannot ever truly defend against every terrorist plot to attack civil aviation. Instead we manage the risk of what is one of the safest modes of transport by providing a trade off between allowing air travel to flourish at its current levels with increasingly pervasive security measures. The biggest issue is that this will never be a fine art. It is why we often see the cracks of logic that allow hidden drugs routinely making their way onto planes but visible and declared bottled water being stopped.

Those involved in working for civil liberty and defence should be well gauged in the risks posed by the threat of international terrorism. It is important they do not fall for the trap of overreaction, which can be damaging to successful counterterrorism. If we follow the trends of demonising a wide target, creating fear and overreaction you leverage the actual risk of terrorism becoming more powerful than it is.

The work of those who aim to protect aviation should be considered in contrast to the reaction of trying to provide security with measures that only increase workloads. In this example is it truly the right course of action to expect that bomb squads should check every conceivable package with special attention to ink cartridges, instead of following intelligence and reasoning to high security threats? Or should we look to remain composed and focused on credible ways to stop threats before they even make it to the airport scanner?