

Airline Security

LEVEL TWO - INTERMEDIATE

Pre-reading activities

- 1 Make a list of all the security checks that take place before passengers are allowed to board a plane.
- 2 The following words and expressions can be found in the article. What do you think the story is about?
 - nervous passengers
 - angry and aggressive
 - check-in desk
 - secret serviceman
 - questions
 - gun
 - refused permission
 - security profile
 - Arab-American
 - appearance
- 3 Now read the article and see if your version of the story is correct.

Airline Security: Dishonest words on racial profiling muddy debate on airline security

WASHINGTON DIARY JULIAN BORGER

It was Christmas Day, three months after the trauma of September 11, and a planeload of exhausted, slightly nervous passengers were going home at the last minute for the holidays, on American Airlines flight 363 from Baltimore Washington International airport to Dallas-Fort Worth. At the check-in desk, an Arab-American was asked a series of questions and, in the end, he was refused permission to board the plane and was left at the gate. This has happened many times on domestic flights in the United States since September 11th, but this time it was different. The Arab-American, Walied Shater, was, in fact, a secret serviceman on his way to guard President George Bush at the "Western White House" in Crawford, Texas. This meant big trouble.

In a discussion about this incident on American TV, an expert used the two words "racial profiling" - one of the most controversial issues in contemporary America. The President said he would be furious if it turned out that Shater was a victim of this practice, in which citizens are selected for special attention because of their skin colour, name or religion. American Airlines said Shater had not been refused permission to board the flight because of his Arab-American identity. Instead, the troubled airline (which lost two planes on September 11) published critical accounts of his behaviour, describing him as angry and aggressive. He had filled in a form which gives permission for government security officers to carry guns on planes, but had filled it in incorrectly twice. His identity was eventually confirmed by the Secret Service, but he had become so aggressive by then that airline officials thought it was best to leave him behind.

Shater has hired lawyers to demand an apology and to force a change in the airline's security measures. The lawyers have gone on television to deny the claims that the presidential bodyguard had behaved unprofessionally. They say it was the pilot who was confrontational. They say that there had been no problem with the gun-carrying forms until the pilot became aware of the passenger's Arab-American identity and a flight attendant found a book on Arab history among his possessions.

It is a fact that Arab-Americans and people with Muslim names have been subjected to much more attention than other passengers on flights since September 11. There have been many cases of people being left off planes because the flight crew and the passengers were worried about their Middle

Airline Security

LEVEL TWO - INTERMEDIATE

Eastern appearance. One pilot told me that one of the key items on the "new security" checklist is checking the passenger list for Islamic names. American Airlines' claim that Shater's Arab-American identity had nothing to do with the pilot's decision looks very dubious. It is hard to imagine the same situation happening to a blond secret serviceman possessing a book about the American civil war, but the airline insists it would have acted in an identical manner.

The fact that all 19 of the hijackers involved in the September 11 attacks were Muslim Arabs has inevitably had an effect on the perceptions of airline pilots and crews. It would be extraordinary if it had not. The majority of trainees who went through al-Qaida's Afghan camps were Muslims from the Middle East or South Asia. It is possible to argue, then, that there might be a significant security benefit in paying particular attention to passengers who fit that profile. On the other hand, the role of a Briton, Richard Reid, a Muslim with a non-Muslim name, in the shoe-bomb attempt on an American Airlines flight before Christmas was a clear reminder that the assailants in the next attack may not conform to the stereotype. Al-Qaida has shown itself to be very skilled at varying its line of attack.

This is a valuable debate. If there is clearly a significant benefit to using ethnic profiling in security screening, there could be further discussion of how to balance security and the civil rights of those people who are screened. Surely, the fact that Mr Shater was a secret serviceman with one of the highest security levels in the USA was more important than the fact that he was of Arab descent. These are important issues but they are currently being avoided because the phrase "racial profiling", usually associated with redneck cops stopping black motorists for questioning, is politically sensitive.

The Guardian Weekly 10-1-2002, page 4

4 Collocations. Match the verbs in the left-hand column with the nouns in the right-hand column:

- | | |
|--------------|----------------|
| 1 refuse | a an apology |
| 2 board | b a claim |
| 3 fill in | c a stereotype |
| 4 deny | d a profile |
| 5 demand | e a form |
| 6 pay | f permission |
| 7 fit | g attention |
| 8 conform to | h a plane |

5 Reported speech. In reported speech the statement is often backshifted:

I am furious He said he was furious

I was furious He said he had been furious

I will be furious He said he would be furious.

Airline Security

LEVEL TWO - INTERMEDIATE

Look again at the second paragraph.

In a discussion about this incident on American TV, an expert used the two words "racial profiling" - one of the most controversial issues in contemporary America. The President said he would be furious if it turned out that Shater was a victim of this practice, in which citizens are selected for special attention because of their skin colour, name or religion. American Airlines said Shater had not been refused permission to board the flight because of his Arab-American identity. Instead, the troubled airline (which lost two planes on September 11) published critical accounts of his behaviour, describing him as angry and aggressive. He had filled in a form which gives permission for government security officers to carry guns on planes, but had filled it in incorrectly twice. His identity was eventually confirmed by the Secret Service, but he had become so aggressive by then that airline officials thought it was best to leave him behind.

In newspaper writing there is a lot of reported speech. Replace the following reported statements with the original statement.

- a The President said he would be furious if it turned out that Shater was a victim...
I will be furious if it _____
 - b American Airlines said Shater had not been refused permission to board
American Airlines _____
 - c (American Airlines said that) He had filled in a form which gives permission But had filled it in incorrectly twice
(American Airlines say that) _____
 - d airline officials thought it was best to leave him behind
airline officials _____
- 6 Complete these sentences using an appropriate form of words from the text:
- 1 Mr Shater was _____ permission to board the plane.
 - 2 He was _____ by the airline as being "angry and aggressive".
 - 3 The Secret Service eventually _____ his identity.
 - 4 His lawyers are _____ an apology.
 - 5 They deny that his _____ was unprofessional.
 - 6 A book on Arab history was _____ among his possessions.
 - 7 The passenger list is often _____ for Islamic names.
 - 8 There is now a discussion about how security and civil rights can be _____.

2 Discussion

Do you think that racial profiling is justified in the case of airline security?

Which is more important: passenger security or the civil rights of passengers?

What is the best way for airlines to maintain security?