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# Knives in Airplane Cabins? No Thanks.

*The TSA's plan to allow these potential weapons onboard is a big mistake.*

By Alice Hoagland

Last month, John Pistole, administrator of the Transportation Security Administration, hosted a private meeting with two 9/11 family members at the TSA's Washington headquarters. I was one of those family members. Mr. Pistole presented us with some classified information, which I promised not to divulge to anyone, but most of our discussion dealt with news that already has been trumpeted around the globe: the TSA's decision to allow knives, sports bats, sticks and poles back into the cabins of commercial aircraft. The rule change is scheduled to take effect on April 25.

I oppose it.

I was grateful to have been included in the meeting with Mr. Pistole. He is a likable man, and I hope he does not consider me rude. But I spoke up. To me, the prospect of airline passenger cabins teeming with knives and club-like weapons is horrible to contemplate. I say this not just as a frequent airline passenger but as a retired United Airlines flight attendant, the sister of a current UA flight attendant, a member of the Association of Flight Attendants, and the mother of a young man, Mark Bingham, who died fighting knife-wielding thugs aboard United Airlines Flight 93.

Knife blades up to six centimeters long, or about two and a half inches, will start showing up in airplane cabins at the end of the month. So will novelty baseball bats, hockey sticks, ski poles, lacrosse sticks, golf clubs and billiard cues.

## Knives Allowed



Associated Press

Even in the face of rising opposition from pilots, air marshals, flight attendants, 130 members of Congress, several airlines and many TSA screeners, Mr. Pistole is unswayed. He maintains that the TSA is tasked with the narrow mission of keeping commercial airplanes free of crippling attacks. He interprets that mandate to mean stopping explosives. Period.

The TSA chief says that hand-held weapons may kill one or two people, but they can no longer be used to bring down an airplane. Why not? Because, he reasons, nowadays cockpit doors are hardened to withstand any breach. Pilots would remain safely sequestered behind those fortress doors regardless of mayhem in the cabin.



Passengers, in this post-9/11 era, would jump to disarm assailants, says Mr. Pistole. He cited the actions by my son and a handful of fellow passengers and flight attendants as they fought against armed al Qaeda attackers in a desperate bid to regain control of a hijacked [Boeing 757](#) on 9/11.

Yes, I agreed. Passengers are more wary now. Case in point: Passengers and crew subdued [Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab](#), the "underwear bomber" on a Northwest Airlines flight in 2009.

But the TSA's new plan is unconscionable. In the meeting with Mr. Pistole, I suggested that if the TSA follows through on this plan, all souls aboard should be issued an advisory: "Caution. During your flight today you may be called upon to fight for your life and the lives of your fellow passengers against knife-and-club-wielding attackers."

The TSA is a vital U.S. government agency. It should set benchmark standards, not lower its expectations to conform to low standards world-wide. (Some other countries permit passengers to board carrying the sort of potential weapons the TSA plans to allow.) Mr. Pistole is concerned about the amount of time spent searching for small knives when personnel would do better to focus on looking for explosives.

It's not clear why the choice now is suddenly to look for one or the other but not both.

One way to decrease the amount of time spent checking carry-on baggage would be for airlines to allow more checked baggage without additional fees. Doing so would encourage passengers to check their baggage so screwdrivers, knives and sports equipment can ride where they belong: in cargo holds inside checked and TSA-screened bags.

How else can we help overburdened transportation security officers? By urging airlines to limit carry-on items to one per passenger, and by actually enforcing carry-on size and weight restrictions. Those rules are habitually ignored. Taking such steps would make aircraft cabins safer for everyone, and would ease the security officers' task: detecting and stopping explosives and hand-held weapons.

Those new rules would take some getting used to. But they wouldn't be as hard to get used to as knowing that, as of April 25, any passenger on a U.S. airliner may be carrying a knife or a club that could kill.

*Ms. Hoagland is a retired United Airlines flight attendant.*

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