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SUMMARY	The Federal Government has announced its two hundred million dollar plan to upgrade airport security. Interview with Norman Shanks, Heathrow Airport.
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HOWARD SATTLER – PRESENTER:

But first up, John Howard's two hundred million dollar plan to make airports secure. This is, by the way, more than four years after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington sparked his own government's be alert, not alarmed campaign. And they told us at the time they were making sure that the airports would be secure.

Well, clearly there's a bit to be done, because it's taken all that time, and it's taken a number of embarrassing breaches of airports around the nation, and a major inquiry to initiate this belated plan. We've got to ask, will it succeed?

His announcement also coincides with the criticism of Australia's terror response plans by a former Special Air Service regiment officer who predicts carnage if there's an attack on a major Australian city. And we've been saying that for some time.

Now the Wheeler report into aviation security which was released today, with the two hundred million dollar expenditure plan, has found policing at our major airports is often





inadequate, and dysfunctional. The report by Sir John Wheeler says the airports suffer from bureaucratic turf wars, and conflicts between the states and the Commonwealth.

I thought we'd go to a leading international expert. He's also been to Australia, and I think he's certainly been to Perth Airport, and probably others here.

Norman Shanks is a leading aviation security expert, and ex-head of security at Heathrow Airport. And we find him on the road between London and Munich. And I'm sure that he's pulled over, for safety's sake.

Hello, Norman. How you going?

NORMAN SHANKS – AVIATION SECURITY EXPERT:

Hello, yeah, I have pulled over, yeah (laughs).

SATTLER:

Very good, because the cops will get you if you don't (laughs).

SHANKS:

They will, yeah.

SATTLER:

All right. Now, you've been to Australia. In fact, you do work for Australian companies here, looking at security. Have you had a look at our major airports in Australia?

SHANKS:

Not for a couple of years, but I doubt that much has changed since I was last there. And you were on a fairly steep learning curve, a couple of years ago, and I think you're probably still on that learning curve, but it's getting better.

SATTLER:

What were the weaknesses that you were able to identify back then?

SHANKS:

Probably pretty much the same as Wheeler has done, although I haven't seen his report. But a disjoint between the various government organisations, Police, Customs, et cetera. That's only part of the problem. There's also a major problem with checked baggage, with carry-on baggage, with cargo, with screening the security restricted

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areas. Couple of those things I'm not sure that Wheeler has picked up on. Not too many people do.

SATTLER:

But aren't they problems that are easily, if not expensively fixed?

SHANKS:

They're very easily fixed, if you know what to do in the first place. So you have to be ... most countries have to be pointed in the right direction. It's well and good conducting background checks on staff given access to the security areas with their passes. That will only find the people who have been, shall we say, careless in the past and have a record. What it won't do is find the people that are too clever to have a record, but have criminal in... or terrorist intent.

So the way to deal with that, or one way you can reduce the problem, is screen all the staff as they go into those secure, restricted areas. We've been doing that in the UK since 1990.

SATTLER:

Yep. You see, the passengers are certainly screened. I've just been overseas and back and, you know, you got to say that you're pretty confident that the ... your baggage, your suitcases, and your carry-on baggage, and your person are fully checked. But you're saying the problem might lay with the people who work there, more likely?

SHANKS:

That's one of the problems. I'm also not convinced that we screen the carry-on baggage correctly. What we do is, we're still looking for weapons used for hijacking aircraft. And even after nine eleven, we still focused on weapons. You know, box cutters, instead of larger knives, and guns.

But what we don't look for, as a matter of routine, are bombs, improvised explosive devices. These are difficult to detect with the technology that's used at virtually every airport around the world. And the irony is that there in Perth, you've got one of the best pieces of equipment for finding plastic explosives.

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SHANKS:

Well, it's manufactured in Perth.

SATTLER:

Oh. But aren't we using it at the airport?

SHANKS:

No, sadly, you're not.

SATTLER:

(Laughs) You're kidding.

SHANKS:

Well, you're not alone. I mean, the company, which is a Perth based company, QRSciences, has been working with one of the leading X-ray manufacturing companies in the US and Europe, and that's Rapiscan. And they put together a quadruple resonance machine with a conventional X-ray. And that will find bombs. It's probably the only piece of kit in carry-on that would find bombs.

SATTLER:

And you reckon it's the best in the world, is it?

SHANKS:

Absolutely. It's being tested in the US now, under a US government program. It is now just market available. And I would predict that's going to be used in a lot of international airports, progressively, over the next year or so.

SATTLER:

What, are you telling me it'll be used overseas before it's being used here, and it's a local product?

SHANKS:

Well, you could use it there first.

SATTLER:

(Laughs) Well, not could, it's not could.

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You should. Yeah, it's a piece of kit. Basically, it uses some technology called quadruple resonance. It's basically radio waves, which make it very easy to find the very complex plastic explosives, which are so difficult to find with other methods. And, by combining it with the sort of X-rays you see, you're used to in carry-on, you've got an ideal tool to find any type of improvised explosive device, or bomb that people try and take on.

SATTLER:

Well, I take it, Norman, the authorities here know about it?

SHANKS:

I was talking to the guys in Canberra a couple of years about this as a separate unit. I know that people within the authorities – Department of Transport, et cetera – in Canberra keep abreast of the technology that's going on. And they will all, no doubt, be aware that this is being trialled in the US.

SATTLER:

Mmm.

SHANKS:

It's now reached the point in the trial that it's ... it's proved itself, and it's really ready to be deployed ...

SATTLER:

Well, one can only ...

SHANKS:

I'd like to see it ... sorry?

SATTLER:

One can only hope that part of the two hundred million dollars is going into purchasing these machines; because there's no guarantee. All they're saying here is: some money will be spent improving the exchange of information on crime; boosting technology to detect explosive – that's the one – and upgrading the customs closed-circuit television capabilities. One can only hope that these machines are included in that.

SHANKS:

You know, Howard, I would ... I would wish you're right. But I don't think you are. The technology for finding explosives, I ... my guess is that, looking at that in checked

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baggage; which is certainly an area that needs to be done. (Indistinct) standard has to be addressed by next year. Many people think that what we're doing in carry-on – for passengers and their carry-on baggage – is enough. I'm not convinced that Wheeler is aware of the weaknesses there; probably didn't even look at it.

SATTLER:

Mmm.

SHANKS:

So I think this is something that needs to be addressed with the Prime Minister's office, or his team who are responsible for improving the security operation at Australia's airports.

SATTLER:

Well, let me tell you, his main thrust today was to tell us that police commanders will be appointed to our eleven major, or category one, airports. More than forty million dollars will be spent on five new joint airport investigation teams. And forty-eight million dollars will go to Customs border patrols of tarmac areas at the seven major airports. Is that ... is that what we needed?

SHANKS:

That's all good stuff, yes, it's certainly what you need. But you need more than that. You also need the airports and the airlines to play their part, because they're the people that have the interface with the passenger. The airports and the airlines will be the people responsible for screening checked baggage; for screening passengers and their carry-on baggage; and they're getting cargo. So, yeah, it's ... it goes a good way. It's a good measure towards what needs to be done. But, unfortunately, in this aviation business, we're always trying to keep one step ahead of the terrorists. And I am fairly convinced that they'll come back to trying to put bombs inside the cabin of aircraft before too long.

SATTLER:

Mmm. And how much at risk is Australia? Because we haven't had a major incident here for decades, in fact, the last major terrorist incident happened, I think, outside the Hilton hotel in Sydney, about twenty-five years ago.

SHANKS:

Yeah. We used to think that way in London, as well, until the recent bombings in July that ... our biggest problem was the Irish; the IRA problem, and that was twenty-odd

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years ago. We're now, I'm afraid, all in the frame for the Al-Qaeda network. Anyone that has remote links with the US is seen as a fair target for these criminally terrorist-minded fanatics in the Al-Qaeda group. So, no-one is safe in any part of the world, I'm afraid, anymore. You've experienced some dreadful problems with your citizens in Bali ...

SATTLER:

Mmm.

SHANKS:

That was ... you could say that was aimed at bringing Australia into the problem, because it's known that a lot of Australians go to Bali for vacation.

SATTLER:

Mmm. Okay. Well ...

SHANKS:

So ...

SATTLER:

Norman, I appreciate your valuable time today, and next time you're in Perth, we may ... we'd love to invite you into the studio, so we'd make that a date if we could. And you enjoy the rest of your drive from London to Munich, and stay safe.

SHANKS:

Thanks, Howard. It's been a pleasure talking to you. Bye.

SATTLER:

Norman Shanks, aviation security expert and, while applauding that some progress might be made now with the expenditure of two hundred million dollars, says we're probably not spending the money in the right area because we ought to be looking at baggage security a lot more than we are, because terrorists are working on this; working on trying to get through the flaws in the system every day, every waking moment of their lives. You might want to comment on that. 9221 1882.

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