

While the presence of firearms in the cockpit and under the control of a properly trained and practiced individual would not, in my opinion, pose an undue threat to the safety of the aircraft, I must also question it's usefulness. There are several factors which suggest that a firearm in the cockpit would be ineffectual in dealing with a determined, and possibly suicidal, hijacker.

First, in a typical 'two-person' cockpit, both pilots are sitting with their backs to the door. For either of them to properly engage an assailant, the pilot with the firearm would need to turn, in his/her seat, around approximately 180 degrees and fire upon a moving target. Given that the pilot is strapped (at least with a lap-belt) into the seat, that the aircraft may well be moving at the time (either due to turbulence, or in a deliberate attempt to destabilize the hijacker) this would be a difficult and time-consuming shot.

Secondly, with the short distance between the door and the flight-crew, an armed pilot would have very little time to react to someone coming through the door, potentially allowing that person to be overcome before the firearm can be put to effective use.

Currently, it is policy to permit certain law enforcement officers (as was demonstrated in the last week with the American Airlines incident) to carry firearms onboard. Either in place of, or in addition to the arming of flight crews, I recommend the following actions:

1. Permit the widest possible cross-section of sworn officers to carry firearms on Part 121 aircraft, and encourage them to do so.
2. Properly fund and support an education program for sworn officers in how to handle their firearm onboard aircraft, to include:
 - Securing the weapon.
 - Using the weapon in a confined and fragile space.
3. Ensure, through a public awareness campaign, that the public is aware of the rules permitting sworn officers to carry firearms on Part 121 aircraft.
4. Use some methodology to encourage sworn officers to use air transport, and to carry their firearms.

I believe that, if properly executed, this technique would provide a valuable addition to the Federal Air Marshal program, and would allow for a much higher percentage of flights to be properly protected.