

I am writing in response to the FAA's request for comments on arming pilots. I am a professional CFII at a large flight academy with hopes of becoming an airline pilot one day soon.

I know that the chances of ever having one of my flights hijacked is miniscule, but I hope that if it ever does happen, that I would have the ability to defend myself.

The events of September 11 show that the old methods of cooperating with the hijacker are not guaranteed to prevent bloodshed. In fact, if the hijacker's purpose is to cause bloodshed, then cooperating is the worst thing that the crew can do.

If you can't trust flight crews with weapons, who can you trust? If a pilot wants to crash the airplane, then he can do it with or without a gun. On the other hand, if someone wants to take control of the aircraft from the flight crew, then the pilot needs to have some means to resist.

Arming of pilots need not be mandatory. It should be an option for those who would like to carry weapons, though. Under my plan, an ATP or commercial pilot with his home state's certification to carry a concealed weapon would be allowed to carry a gun throughout US airports. State concealed carry permits typically require background checks and firearms training.

The bigger question is how to coordinate this policy with flight crews of international flights. I am certain, however, that the State Department could handle this issue, even if it meant that the crews might have to check their weapons when clearing customs in certain nations.

Flight crews desiring to carry weapons should also receive specialized training in marksmanship, negotiating techniques, and emergency medical treatment. Small bore weapons with low velocity bullets (such as 9mm) would be used to minimize damage to the aircraft and collateral damage to passengers. Counter terrorism groups have used these type weapons when dealing hijack scenarios because the bullets do not penetrate like those of large caliber weapons and could be stopped by seats, walls, etc.

Note that I do not address the issue of carrying nonlethal weapons such as stun guns or tasers. I think that if the decision is made to allow weapons for flight crews, then it should not be done halfway. Nonlethal weapons have limitations to range and stopping power that could cause problems in a hijack.

I support the Sky Marshal program, but question whether it will be cost effective to place a Sky Marshal on every airline flight. The number of marshals would have to be huge. There would also be a significant delay in training so many officers. Additionally, even if a marshal were on every flight, one marshal versus 5 or 6 hijackers, even if they are only armed with knives, is not good odds, especially if the hijackers are already committed to dying.

In conclusion, I believe that arming pilots and flight crews is a thoroughly American solution to the hijacker problem. However, it should also be viewed as a part of the overall solution and not as a panacea. The right to self-defense has been ingrained in our culture since our nation's birth. We should not give up that right when we board an airplane.