JACKING HISTORY

While details are sketchy, the t reported hijacking is said to e occurred in Peru in 1931. And he 20 years following World r ll, there were a number involv- political refugees.

The threat to civil aviation ly escalated in intensity and lence, however, in the late 60s. king the outbreak all the more ming was the fact that the petrators were often known inals, political militants or, as ven, the mentally unstable.

Since then, the legal concept olice control and custody has dually been superseded, and even laced, by the idea that the pre- tion of terrorist and criminal ression should be as much a onsibility of the civil aviation munity as air navigation is ay.

One does not have to be a et scientist to comprehend the rmous complexity of the chal- e facing the industry. Consider, example, the sheer diversity of ns that can be used by a terror- criminals, or deranged persons, er singly or in combination.

These may include crew nbers, passengers and carry-on gage, cargo and mail, catering fuelling, ground service vehi- and, most dangerous of all, nd service personnel.

Adding to the complexity of problem is its international ensions. An aircraft departing a tion where airport security is k may constitute a danger rever it travels and wherever it ls.

In light of these factors, it becomes immediately obvious that any security and protection mechanism to be implemented can only be as strong as the weakest link in the huge international network chain.

In other words, for such a mechanism to be truly effective, it is imperative that all the world's international airlines and airports attain an equivalent and uniform level of efficiency. It is to this end that ICAO has been working intensively for almost the past three decades through what the Organization refers to as Annexes to the Chicago Convention. With impressive results.

MAJOR MILESTONES

Annex 17, for example, adopted in 1974, provides measures aimed at the safeguarding of international civil aviation against acts of unlawful interference. In this regard, what appeared to be a losing battle a quarter-century ago is gradually being won today.

There are several reasons for this, not the least of which is reduced political tension in traditionally volatile parts of the world. Security measures designed and enforced by civil aviation authorities have also helped significantly, with the use of X-rays, metal detectors, explosive sniffing devices, luggage scanners and other high-tech equipment, making it more difficult for terrorists to ply their trade.

ICAO and other civil aviation authorities have also pressed ahead with campaigns to get States to sign international treaties making unlawful interference with aircraft an international crime and committing them to collaborate even with rival States to defeat such interference.

SAFEST FORM OF TRANSPORT

Safety in scheduled air services has improved tremendously since ICAO came into existence.

In 1947, 590 passengers were killed in 24 fatal aircraft accidents (figures do not include the USSR). This translates into 3.12 passenger fatalities per 100 million passenger-kilometres. The safety level has improved steadily since then, to the extent that in 1992, the fatality rate had declined to 0.06.

And despite the crashes and terrorist activities that grab international headlines, air travel remains the safest form of transport. To put it in perspective, one would need to take an airplane trip every day for the next 40 years to have a 50-50 chance of dieing in a crash.

Prior to this Annex, airlines faced the dilemma of either taking a risk or stopping a flight every time there was a bomb threat or hoax. National laws now established and prescribing severe penalties, even for silly jokes about "a bomb in my suitcase", have helped reduce such incidences.

Yet another example of ICAO's determination to effectively combat the problem is the effort that has been put into making plastic explosives more difficult to obtain. Some of the most notorious acts of terrorism against aircraft involved the use of such explosives.

PLASTIC EXPLOSIVES

It is no secret that, in the past, plastic explosives were difficult to detect using commonly available airport security equipment. After the