Passport to Terrorism

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Introduction

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world, generating 10 percent of global GDP and providing 277 million jobs worldwide in 2014 (World Travel and Tourism Council [WTTC], 2015). The tourism industry has a direct effect on the economic and social development of many countries through the creation of jobs, opportunity for entrepreneurialism, increase of trade and capital investment, and protection of culture and heritage. Some nations are completely dependent on tourism as their main source of revenue generation, and as a result are reliant on the industry as being a major provider of employment and foreign exchange earnings (Yap & Saha, 2013; Ranga & Pradham, 2014; Tarlow, 2014). Therefore, the occurrence of any event that has a major effect on the willingness to travel can critically impact the economy, the livelihood of citizens, and consequently the world.

While there are many events that have negative consequences on tourism, terrorism can be extremely detrimental. Terrorism is an intentional act with the purpose striking fear for hopes of political gain. Additionally, terrorism is extremely difficult to predict and affects people on a much wider scale. It is because of these characteristics that the risk or threat of terrorism to a destination has severe impacts on its tourism industry.

There are various studies on the affects terrorism has on the tourism industry, from both a tourism wide perspective (Yap & Saha, 2013; Tarlow, 2014; Korstanje, 2015), and destination specific (Ranga & Pradhan, 2014; Dobreva, 2015). Similarly, there are many studies that discuss why tourists tend to be targets for terrorism. For example, Tarlow (2014) explains that tourist and tourist sites have been successful targets for terrorism for reasons, including media publicity, opportunity for mass casualties, and ability to damage the nation’s self-image. However, there is very little research on how tourists can indirectly be a target, as well as a cause of terrorism. In particular, there is a gap in the research on the relationship between terrorism and tourists’ passports.

As the number of individuals travelling internationally continues to rise, the number of passport holders is also increasing. Ownership of a passport is invaluable to those who wish to travel internationally, and loss or theft of a passport can create a hassle to the traveler, resulting in inability to enter or leave the country, time and monetary constraints, and potential identity theft. However, the consequences of passport theft may be more severe, including use of the passport for the purpose of illegal immigration, drug trafficking, and terrorism (U.S. Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2005).

The purpose of this exploratory study is to discover how passports, specifically stolen passports, play a role in terrorism. Through a content analysis of news articles reporting terrorist incidents, this study seeks to examine how passports have been used for terrorism in the past and the significance of their role in the terrorist attack. This knowledge will allow a better understanding of the need to education tourists on measures to protect their passports.

Literature Review

In order to understand terrorism and its relationship and effect on the tourism industry, a definition on what constitutes as terrorism is necessary. The dictionary defines terrorism as “the
use of violence and intimidation in the pursuit of political aims” (Marriam-Webster, 2015). Similarly, in the tourism literature, terrorism is defined as the intentional use/threat of violence for political, religious, or ideological objectives through intimidation of a large group of people (Ganor, 1998; Enders and Sandler, 2002, Lutz & Lutz, 2008; Ranga & Pradham, 2014).

Found in each of the definitions is the relationship of terrorism to politics. Politics and terrorism are intertwined as the purpose of terrorism situations is to achieve political goals. Countries in political turmoil or suffering from political strife are therefore frequently at a higher risk for terrorism. Likewise, tourism is sensitive to the political environment and countries with poor political stability can create a negative destination image of the entire region and increase the perceived risk of visiting that destination or area (Yap & Saha, 2013).

While terrorism appears to be more frequent in recent years, the issue of terrorism has been affecting tourism for decades. Following the first major terrorist attack on a tourism destination in 1972 during the Olympic Games in Munich terrorism began making headlines around the world, reaching an all-time high in the 1980s (Sonmez & Graefe, 1998). Many scholars attribute the rise in terrorism to the growth of mass communications during this period, as terrorists groups seek to get their messages to reach the largest possible audience.

The attacks on September 11, 2001 (known as 9/11) in the USA brought the realization to Western society that terrorism is closer to home than once expected. Since then, there have been numerous attacks in major tourism destinations, such as Canada, England, Australia, USA, Bali, Kenya, Israel, Philippines, Morocco, Peru and Mexico (Tarlow, 2014). Within the past year terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels have had vast media attention due to previously being considered primarily safe destinations. The current increase of terrorism in tourist destinations is not unwarranted. With the purpose of terrorism being to create fear among large populations, tourism destinations provide areas where a broad international audience can be reached, forcing more parties to get involved and a greater overall impact. Dobreva (2015) states, “as the 21st century faces tourism as the leading economy, it also faces terrorism as the leading threat.”

With terrorism being a commonly occurring risk in certain destinations, tourism professionals are looking for ways to mitigate the risks to travelers, by informing them of ways to avoid these risks and what to do in the event that these risks are faced. In terms of passport theft, while risk of theft in general relates to the perceptions of crime in a destination, passport theft in particular may be perceived as higher risk as it can lead to more severe consequences, including terrorism.

When a terrorist strikes outside of their home nation, often the first question asked is, “how did they get into the country?” The answer to this is likely either loose border security, the person was not deemed a threat when entering the country, or a stolen passport (Guild, 2006). As seen following the September 11 attacks and in many other cases, the response by government and security agencies post terrorist attack is the tightening border security. However, evidence has shown that even with increased border security, terrorists are still entering the country. In a 2004 study, the Department of Homeland Security found that when lookouts were not posted for a stolen passport, 81 percent of aliens attempting entry were admitted, and for those who had lookouts posted prior to their attempted entries, 73 percent were admitted. Although passport fraud detection and border control is likely to have increased since this study was performed, it is improbable that these results have changed drastically.
Therefore, it is hypothesized in this study that the use of stolen passports plays a primary role in international terrorism, whether for the purpose of migration, identity theft, or even to help identify citizens of a particular nationality to ensure their message is received by the right people. For example, in the hijacking on the PanAm flight in Karachi, Pakistan in 1986, it is reported that the hijackers collected the passports of the passengers on board, looking specifically for American passports. Knowing this information, the flight attendants, while sifting through the passports, hid the American ones, causing the hijackers to settle for someone of British decent (Mohan, 2016). The reasoning behind the search of Americans on board is likely due to the political and media power of the United States, with Britain being the second most powerful in media and politics.

These media articles and reports on terrorist attacks may prove that passports play an important role in terrorism activity and can help to inform travellers that having their passport stolen is not solely a personal inconvenience to them, but can have detrimental consequences. Therefore, this study seeks to analyze articles and reports on terrorism in an attempt to better understand the role that passports play. This knowledge can be used to inform travellers of these risks, causing them to take more protective measures against potential theft.

Method

To understand how passports play a role in terrorism, news articles and reports from past terrorist activity are reviewed. Specifically, this study employs a content analysis of news articles reporting on terrorist attacks that involve passports.

The sample was collected using a keyword search of Lexisnexis® Academic databases. Using the keywords ‘Terrorism’ and ‘Passport’, the published articles discussing the topic were retrieved. The top five newspapers listed (The Guardian, The Australian, Right Vision News, The Sydney Morning Herald, and The Toronto Star) were selected for analysis. The four countries in which these newspapers derive (Canada, UK, Australia and Pakistan) are English-speaking and each enjoy a large number of readership in their countries (Lexis Nexis, 2014). Therefore, it is believed that selection of newspapers can provide an appropriate sample to explore the content surrounding terrorism and passports.

The data collected December 2016 resulted in a total of 134 articles relating to the topic, with the publish date ranging from 1986 to 2016. The articles were then narrowed and filtered to remove duplicates. The final sample consisted of 109 articles from the five newspapers. Following the review and analysis of the remaining 109 articles, additional filtering was performed ensure only those that involved the use of a stolen or fraudulent passport were included.

Results

The 109 articles, with duplicates removed, were fairly evenly distributed between the five newspapers; 25 (22.9%) were from The Guardian, 24 (22%) from The Sydney Morning Herald, 23 (21.1%) from Right Vision News, 19 (17.4%) from The Toronto Star, and 18 (16.5%) from the Australian. The most recent article was published on July 3, 2016 by The Australian, and the earliest article dating back to February 9, 1986 by The Toronto Star, providing over 30 years of articles related to the topic. More than double the amount of articles were published in 2014 than in any other year (23.9%).
As part of the initial analysis, the locational setting that the article discussed was reported. However, it was found that each of the articles referred to the issue of passports and terrorism within their respective locations. For example, the majority of articles regarding Australia were published by either The Australian or The Sydney Morning Herald, and those regarding Pakistan were solely discussed by Right Vision News.

In order to assist in narrowing the topics of the articles to those that discussed stolen passports in relation to terrorism, the articles were categorized into two variables: ownership of passport and role of passport. Ownership of passport (Table 1) divided the articles into those that related to official government issued passports, stolen passports, fake/fraudulent passports, combinations of various categories, and those that did not mentioned whether the passport was issued, fake, or stolen.

Table 1: Ownership of Passport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issued</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>50.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Mentioned</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stolen/Fake</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fake</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stolen</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stolen/Issued</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>109</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ‘role of passport’ variable categorized the articles into the role that the passport played in the article (Table 2). Based on previous review of situations where passports played a role in terrorist attacks, the initial categories included migration, identity theft, identifying targets for terrorism, and other. However, once the articles were reviewed, it was found that these categories were insufficient and a new category, stripping/denying passports, was added to better reflect the discussion within the articles. The stripping/denying of passports refers to situations where governments cancelled, removed, forced the surrender of, or denied applications for passports to citizens who were suspected of being involved in terrorism activities. Migration refers to any situation in which a passport was used to get from one country to another. Other were those that were related to the topic of passports and terrorism but did not fall into any of the categories, and unrelated included articles that did not relate at all to the topic, for example the opening of new passport offices.

Table 2: Role of Passport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stripping/Denying</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrelated</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying Terrorists</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>109</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Examples of ‘other’ articles include the use of increased technology to better detect passport fraud (5.5%), the discussion of Canadian passports as being ‘high value’ to terrorists (2.8%), and the gathering of world leaders to discuss measures to combat terrorism (1.8%).

As the purpose of this study was to understand how stolen passports could be used for terrorism purposes, a secondary analysis was conducted which eliminated all articles in which the passports were official government issued, or the ownership of the passport was not mentioned in the article. Fake/fraudulent passports remained in the dataset as it was often combined in the discussion of stolen passports, and the category ‘stolen/issued’ also remained as the article discussed both types of ownership. 27 articles, 24.8 percent of the initial dataset remained in the analysis. In contrast to the initial analysis, the most common role of the passport in the articles was migration, following by other (Table 3). There were no unrelated articles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Migration</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>51.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>37.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stripping/Denying</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying Terrorists</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When reviewing these 27 articles, 16 (59.3%) of these are of particular importance to the tourism industry and can be used to spread awareness to tourists about the need to ensure their passports are kept safe, or reported if lost or stolen. Some examples of these include the following:

- A passport that was reported missing was found on a drug dealer to be smuggled to a suspected terrorist boarding Eurostar train from London to Brussels. Drug dealer had been charged on previous offences of selling stolen passports (The Guardian, 2014).
- Two people who were reported being on missing Flight MH370 were not on the flight, but had their passports stolen/lost when travelling in Phuket. Complaints of stolen and list passports are frequent in Phuket and the island is a ‘hotbed of identity theft’ (The Guardian, 2014).
- “Serbian police have arrested a man carrying a Syrian passport with the same details as one found near the body of one of the Paris suicide bombers.” (The Guardian, 2015)
- “Fraudsters are committing increasingly serious offences linked to terrorism, abduction and sex tourism under the shield of Australian passports. The theft of three Australian identities in the assassination of a Hamas leader in Dubai has highlighted a chronic vulnerability to passport fraud. World’s best technology could not prevent people having their passports mimicked or stolen.” (The Australian, 2010).
- “A suspected terrorist having a Canadian passport is being sought after in Italy after the US and British Embassy grounds in Italy were hit by rockets. The passport was stolen by a true Canadian in Spain a year ago.” (The Toronto Star, 1987).

Conclusion and Discussion

The purpose of this research was to increase the knowledge of the potential risks associated with passport theft. Particularly, this study intended to determine the relationship between stolen
passports and terrorism, with the intention of spreading awareness to tourists and professionals of the need to keep passports safe when travelling internationally. While the majority of articles collected did not relate specifically to stolen passports, those that discussed the use of government issued passports provide insight into the ways in which governments are trying to combat terrorism.

Over half of the articles related to passports and terrorism discussed increase security measures that enable countries like England, Canada, USA, and Australia to strip, seize, cancel or deny passports on the grounds of suspected of terrorism. While in theory this may seem effective to ensure that terrorists do not travel to their intended target destinations, this method does not prevent terrorists from obtaining stolen/fraudulent passports. In reality, these measures may increase the use of stolen passports being used for terrorism purposes. Therefore, it is increasingly important for authorities to implement procedures or technology that helps to improve the detection of fraudulent passports. Similarly, it is important to ensure that tourists are aware of the potential use of their passport, if stolen, and are engaging in behaviours that help mitigate the risk of passport theft.

References


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