

Villaraigosa appoints panel to study LAX security

By Art Marroquin Staff Writer
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Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa on Thursday appointed a "blue-ribbon" panel of 26 aviation, homeland security and law enforcement experts to determine whether Los Angeles International Airport is prone to a terrorist attack.

The independent committee is expected to start meeting later this month, according to the Mayor's Office.

When the review is complete, panel members in the spring will provide a list of recommendations on how to improve security, safety, fire and emergency management at LAX, the nation's third-busiest airport.

"This panel will have full authority to review and inspect all aspects of security at LAX," Villaraigosa said in a written statement.

"We have continually made improvements to security at LAX," he said. "But we must ensure our facility and protocols remain state-of-the-art to prevent and disrupt potential threats."

Along with the 26 panelists named by Villaraigosa, a team of security advisers from Israel's Ben Gurion International Airport will return for a third visit to LAX.

The study was ordered by Villaraigosa after the head of the Los Angeles Airport Peace Officers Association alleged in July that LAX was "more vulnerable to a terrorist attack than at any time since 9-11" due to budget and staffing cuts to the Airport Police Department.

Marshall McClain, president of the LAAPOA, said he made that statement in hopes that additional officers would be hired to the airport police department.

"Our main contention is that we want to have more equipment, more staffing and more training, but it doesn't mean that our officers aren't doing a great job," McClain said. "Just like the mayor is calling for more police officers in the city, we are asking for more officers at the airport."

During the summer, airport officials said that LAX's police force grew from 300 officers in 2001 to 447 officers this year. The department's annual budget also grew, even as fewer travelers pass through the airport.

"We strive to deliver the best safety and security at LAX, as demonstrated by our continual investment in law enforcement personnel and technology," said Gina Marie Lindsey, executive director of LAX.

Despite the recent gains in staffing and funds, McClain said he hoped that the intent of the security study is not a call to have the Los Angeles Police Department take over patrols at LAX from the airport police force, or "any other political agenda."

In 2005, city voters rejected a charter amendment that would have folded the LAX police department into the LAPD.

"Our association will wait and see what they have to say, but we're confident in the abilities of our airport police officers," McClain said. "We're hoping that the report will reconfirm that airport police are experts in their field."

The panel includes:

Retired U.S. District Judge Lourdes Baird

Retired Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Judith Chirlin

Former Los Angeles Fire Department Chief Douglas Barry

Robert Bonner, former commissioner of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency and former administrator of the Drug Enforcement Agency

Los Angeles Port Police Chief Ronald Boyd

Los Angeles Police Department Deputy Chief Michael Downing

Los Angeles Police Commissioner Richard Drooyan

Jeffrey Fegan, CEO of Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport

James Featherstone, general manager of the Los Angeles Emergency Management Department

Steven Gomez, special agent in charge of the FBI's counterterrorism division in Los Angeles

Retired LAPD Deputy Chief Michael Hillmann

Bruce Hoffman, a professor at Georgetown University and former chair of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency at the RAND Corp.

Ronald L. Iden, senior vice president and chief security officer of the Walt Disney Co. and former director of the California Office of Homeland Security

John Linstrom, emergency management consultant

James Lonergan, a former fire chief of the Massachusetts Port Authority and Boston Logan International Airport who now works as a consultant

Assistant Chief Ethel McGuire of the LAX police department

Randy Parsons, federal security director at LAX

Alan Rothenberg, president of the Los Angeles Board of Airport Commissioners

James Smith, an aviation and emergency management consultant

Security consultant Erroll Southers, a former FBI agent and former assistant police chief at LAX

Milind Tambe, professor of computer science and industrial and systems engineering at USC

Los Angeles Airport Commissioner Fernando Torres-Gil

James Wall, associate research professor for Texas A&M University's Department of Industrial and Systems Engineering

Los Angeles Deputy Mayor Eileen Decker

Los Angeles City Councilman Greig Smith, who chairs the council's Public Safety Committee

Ted Stein, former president of the Los Angeles airport and harbor commissions

art.marroquin@dailybreeze.com