

New autopilot will make another 9/11 impossible

13 April 2012

A hijack-proof piloting system for airliners is being developed to prevent terrorists repeating the 9/11 outrages.

The mechanism is designed to make it impossible to crash the aircraft into air or land targets - and enable the plane to be flown by remote control from the ground in the event of an emergency.

Scientists at aircraft giant Boeing are testing the tamper-proof autopilot system which uses state-of-the-art computer and satellite technology.

It will be activated by the pilot flicking a simple switch or by pressure sensors fitted to the cockpit door that will respond to any excessive force as terrorists try to break into the flight deck.

Once triggered, no one on board will be able to deactivate the system. Currently, all autopilots are manually switched on and off at the discretion of pilots.

The so-called 'uninterruptible autopilot system' - patented secretly by Boeing in the US last week - will connect ground controllers and security services with the aircraft using radio waves and global satellite positioning systems.

After it has been activated, the aircraft will be capable of remote digital control from the ground, enabling operators to fly it like a sophisticated model plane, manoeuvring it vertically and laterally.

A threatened airliner could be flown to a secure military base or a commercial airport, where it would touch down using existing landing aids known as 'autoland function'.

After it had landed, the aircraft's built-in autobrake would bring the plane safely to a halt on the runway.

Boeing insiders say the new anti-hijack kit could be fitted to airliners all over the world, including those in the UK, within the next three years.

The latest move to combat airline terrorists follows The Mail on Sunday's disclosure three weeks ago that scientists in Britain and Germany are developing a passenger-monitoring device.

This will use tiny cameras linked to specialist computers to record every twitch, blink, facial expression or suspicious movement made on board flights in order to identify potential terrorists.

A Boeing spokesman said : "We are constantly studying ways we can enhance the safety, security and efficiency of the world's airline fleet.

"There is a need in the industry for a technique that conclusively prevents unauthorised persons gaining access to the controls and threatening the safety of passengers.

"Once this system is initiated, no one on board is capable of controlling the flight, making it useless for anyone to threaten violence in order to gain control."