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SCIENTISTS SEEK A DETERRENT

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BBRITISH scientists are playing a leading part in designing weapons to beat skyjackers.

A dynamite detector has been made and tested at Waltham Abbey, the Ministry of Technology's explosives establishment in Essex. It is one of the growing arsenal of weapons and detectors intended for use at the world's airports.

It takes only 15 seconds to find one part in 20 million of nitro-glycerine, the explosive constituent of dynamite.

The instrument's probe can easily be pushed into an aircraft luggage hold or warehouse. As it costs only about £10 it could be widely used.

Dart guns rejected

Dart guns which could temporarily paralyse a skyjacker are considered too slow in acting to be of any practical use. A better weapon appears to be the low-velocity bullet fired by special revolvers.

These are said to be in use by El Al the Israeli airline. The bullet travels fast enough to kill but not so fast as to penetrate the aircraft's hull, causing decompression and the possible break-up of the plane at high altitude.

Mace gas, a more harmless variety of CS riot gas, has been successfully used in American hospitals, where dangerous patients have to be rapidly disabled before they can harm themselves or others.

Pumping this, or spraying other gases through the aircraft's air conditioning system when the alarm is raised, may be a possibility.

It would affect all passengers as well as the skyjacker, but would not harm the pilot, as he would be wearing his oxygen mask.