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The Captain Speaking

The effort of Acting F.B.I. Director L. Patrick Gray to justify his agents' abortive gunplay in trying to stop the recent aerial hijacking in Florida has been unconvincing. By shooting out the jet's tires, the F.B.I. endangered the lives of passengers and crew both by leaving the craft even less airworthy and by exposing those inside the plane to the wrath of their demented captors.

These facts have been borne out by the testimony of Capt. J. J. O'Donnell, president of the Air Line Pilots Association, who termed the gunplay a case of tactical bungling and of inexcusable disregard for what ought to be the overriding counsel — the word of the pilot in command. The outstanding performance of the men in the cockpit in past instances of air piracy is ample proof that these skilled professionals know better than anybody in Washington or in the airlines executive offices how best to deal with an emergency and when properly to call for outside help.

The Government and the airlines for their part ought to address themselves to the admittedly difficult but absolutely essential task of taking every possible step to prevent hijackings—which has not been done so far—and of closing the hijackers' foreign sanctuaries—which has not been done at all. On this score, neither Congress, Administration nor the airlines—not to mention foreign Governments—have acted with anything like the determination and resourcefulness shown by the pilots at the controls.