



HEAD-OF-STATE TRANSPORTATION MISSIONS

BIZLINERS VS PURPOSE-BUILT BUSINESS JETS REQUIREMENT

BY THOMAS CHATFIELD

The need for efficient, secure, and comfortable air travel for heads of state is paramount in today's geopolitical climate. The choice between purpose-built business jets and bizliners—a term for commercial airliners converted for private use— is influenced by many factors, including entourage size, security requirements, comfort levels, operational requirements, and specific mission profiles. In this overview, we analyse these considerations and review how they influence the selection and customisation of aircraft for governmental use.





The German Air Force operates an executive transport wing that performs a wide variety of tasks, including transporting VIPs, government officials, members of parliament, and high-ranking Bundeswehr officers. It operates a fleet of wide-body and narrow-body bizliners in addition to purpose-built business jets.

Purpose-Built Business Jets

Purpose-built business jets are aircraft specifically designed for corporate and private aviation. Manufacturers like Bombardier, Gulfstream, and Dassault all produce jets that prioritise efficiency, speed, and range. Models such as the Bombardier Global series, Gulfstream G650/G700, and Dassault Falcon are renowned for their advanced avionics, luxurious cabins, and ability to operate from smaller airports. These jets are ideal for heads of state who require swift travel with minimal entourage, offering the flexibility to access remote locations and the efficiency of shorter flight times.



In 2019, Bombardier delivered three Global 6000 business jets to The German Luftwaffe, a longtime Bombardier aircraft operator, which uses these purpose-built long-range business jets to fulfill political and parliamentary transport requirements.

Bizliners

Bizliners, on the other hand, are commercial airliners converted into private jets. Examples include Boeing Business Jets (BBJ) and Airbus Corporate Jets (ACJ). These aircraft offer significantly more space than traditional business jets, allowing for extensive customisation and the capacity to carry larger delegations. The spacious interiors can accommodate private suites, conference rooms, medical facilities, and ample seating for staff and media. Bizliners are particularly suited to missions requiring extended range and the transport of sizable entourages.



In July 2024, the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) started operating its new fleet of two Boeing 737 MAX 8 Boeing Business Jet (BBJ), acquired to replace the aging 737-700 BBJ-derived Special Purpose Aircraft (SPA). The new aircraft can carry 32 passengers and features a dedicated crew rest area and lie-flat seating. The new aircraft was used for King Charles III and Queen Camilla's first visit to Australia as Sovereign in October 2024.

Role and responsibilities

Heads of state have unique travel requirements that extend beyond the typical needs of corporate executives or private individuals. They must maintain continuous communication with their governments, respond to international events promptly, and often travel with a substantial support team. The aircraft serving these roles must therefore be equipped to function as mobile command centres, ensuring that state affairs can be managed seamlessly while in transit.



Entourage Size

The size of the delegation accompanying a head of state significantly impacts aircraft selection. A typical entourage may include ministers, advisors, security personnel, media representatives, medical staff, and other support roles. For example, the President of the United States travels with a considerable team, necessitating the use of a Boeing 747-200, known as Air Force One. Other countries operate head-of-state Boeing 747 aircraft, while other states have opted for aircraft ranging from Airbus ACJ319 to ACJ350 and Boeing BBJ1 to BBJ787 aircraft. Nations that operate these large Airbus and Boeing aircraft often also maintain smaller purpose-built business jets within their fleets. These jets are useful for missions that involve fewer passengers and may require greater discretion. Smaller nations or those with limited requirements may opt for purpose-built business jets when travelling with fewer personnel.

Security Considerations

Security is a paramount concern for head-of-state travel. Stringent protocols govern who can access, operate and work on these aircraft, with crew and maintenance personnel undergoing thorough background checks and security clearances. Anti-missile defence systems are often discreetly installed, particularly by governments operating their aircraft into regions with potential threats. These systems,

such as infrared countermeasures that deploy flares or lasers to confuse incoming threats, enhance the aircraft's defensive capabilities without being readily apparent.

Comfort and Functionality

The need for comfort is balanced with functionality in head-of-state aircraft. Facilities often include a private head of state suite for rest, meeting rooms for in-flight conferences, and offices equipped with the necessary technology to conduct affairs of state. Catering must reflect the high standards of the state, accommodate various dietary requirements and the capacity to serving the number of passengers carried, efficiently.

Operational Limitations and Usage

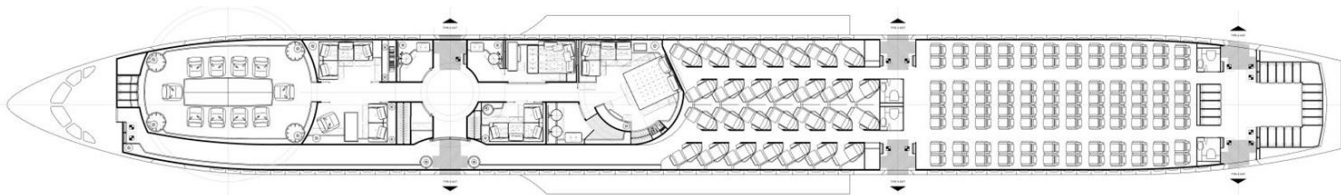
Range requirements are dictated by the typical mission profiles of the head of state. Nations engaged in frequent long-haul flights may prioritise aircraft with extended range capabilities, while others may accept shorter ranges with the understanding that occasional refuelling stops are acceptable. Cargo capacity is another consideration, especially for countries that use their aircraft for humanitarian missions or have a need to transport equipment and supplies.

Wide-Body Aircraft

Wide-body aircraft are often the choice for nations requiring the transport of large delegations over long distances. They offer the most space and can be configured to include various classes of seating, from luxurious private suites to functional areas for support staff.



Qatar Amiri Flight 747-8 operates flights for the royal family of Qatar and government officials



Alexander Craker Airbus ACJ350-900 conceptual passenger arrangement for a large delegation transportation

Narrow-Body Aircraft

Narrow-body aircraft, such as the BBJ1 or BBJMax8 or the ACJ390 or ACJ320, are suitable for nations with moderate entourage sizes and medium-range mission requirements



In 2019, the Dutch government introduced a new BBJ for top officials' transportation. The new narrow-body replaces the previously used Fokker 70

Purpose-Built Business Jets

For missions with a fewer entourage, purpose-built business jets offer efficiency and the ability to operate from a wider range of airports.



In 2023, the UK's Royal Air Force replaced its 40-year-old Bae146 VIP aircraft with two brand-new Dassault Falcon 900LX

Balancing Functionality and Luxury

Multipurpose aircraft

In countries where government budgets are under tight scrutiny, there is a focus on functionality and the multi-mission capabilities of the head-of-state aircraft. These governments prioritize essential features and versatility, ensuring the aircraft can serve various roles while maintaining necessary comfort.



The Royal Air Force Voyager “Vespina” provides secure, cost-effective, and suitably profiled transport for Government Ministers and the UK Royal Family. In addition to its VIP Role, the aircraft remains certified for its original use, including Air-to-Air refueling and personnel transport.

Single-mission aircraft

In other countries, there is more freedom to focus on comfort and luxury that match the country's traditions, lifestyle, and the prestige of its leadership. These aircraft are often extensively personalized, featuring lavish materials, intricate designs, and opulent furnishings that embody national wealth and status.

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The 747 is the most iconic airplane in the world. The double-decker Queen of the Skies is operated by several governments for VVIP and Head of State transportation

Communication Systems

Advanced communication systems are integral to head-of-state aircraft, ensuring uninterrupted, secure connectivity. Multiple satellite systems provide redundancy allowing continuous voice and data transmission even when traversing remote regions. Communications specialists often accompany the delegation to manage these sophisticated systems, ensuring that the head of state can maintain real-time contact with government officials and international leaders.

Medical Facilities

Medical preparedness is a critical aspect of head-of-state travel. Aircraft may be equipped with telemedicine systems, allowing real-time consultation with medical professionals on the ground. In some cases, especially for nations with significant resources, aircraft include medical suites staffed by onboard doctors capable of handling emergencies, including surgical procedures.



Range and Refuelling

The ability to conduct long-range flights without refuelling is advantageous for uninterrupted travel and mission efficiency. Some head-of-state aircraft, like the current US Air Force One, have in-flight refuelling capabilities, although this feature is becoming less common due to advancements in aircraft range and efficiency since both the current 747-200 Air Force One's entered service 34 years ago (1990).

Crew and Maintenance

Operating a head-of-state aircraft requires flight, cabin and maintenance crews with specialised training and security clearances. Each is carefully vetted with stringent protocols in place to prevent security breaches. The risk of espionage necessitates secure facilities and procedures during all phases of aircraft operation, maintenance and servicing. When the aircraft undergoes a heavy maintenance event, the aircraft will normally be fenced off at the contracted maintenance facility with security protocols in place, and detailed checks performed prior to the aircraft being returned to government service.

CONCLUSION

Selecting the appropriate aircraft for head-of-state missions is a complex decision influenced by factors such as range, entourage size, security needs, comfort requirements, and operational considerations. The choice between purpose-built business jets and bizliners becomes a strategic decision, aligning with the nation's resources, political structure, and international engagement.

Larger countries or those with extensive international roles often maintain a diverse fleet of aircraft to match specific missions. This approach ensures that the right aircraft is available for the right purpose, optimising efficiency, security, and cost-effectiveness.

Understanding the nuanced requirements of head-of-state travel—from risk profiles and security considerations to mission-specific needs—highlights the importance of customisation and strategic planning in aircraft selection and operation. As global dynamics evolve, so too will the approaches nations take to fulfil the bizliner mission, balancing tradition with innovation to meet the demands of the future.



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