



**One Hundred Thirteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515**

February 11, 2014

Honorable John S. Pistole
Administrator
Transportation Security Administration
601 South 12th Street
Arlington, VA 20598

Dear Administrator Pistole:

We are writing to express our concern with the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) decision to allow passengers arriving in the United States from Abu Dhabi International Airport to bypass domestic passenger screening during a time of heightened threats to the aviation sector and prior to formal preclearance certification of the passenger screening methods used in the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.).

During a briefing on January 9, 2014, a high-level TSA official told Members of the Committee that passengers arriving to the United States from Abu Dhabi International Airport would be re-screened domestically prior to boarding connecting flights until preclearance certification was completed and screening procedures were personally observed and evaluated by the official. On February 5, 2014, the Committee was informed that, despite these assurances, TSA decided to do a "soft launch" of aviation security preclearance for passengers on flights arriving to the United States starting the next day, February 6, 2014. TSA informed the Committee that this policy would result in passengers arriving from Abu Dhabi International Airport being allowed to deplane directly into the sterile area of airports in the United States and board connecting flights without being re-screened.

Remarkably, on the very same day that the Committee was informed of the implementation of preclearance for U.S.-bound flights from Abu Dhabi, TSA informed the Committee that, based on new found threat information regarding the aviation sector, TSA informed air carriers that it was issuing a security directive prohibiting liquids, gels, aerosols, and powders of any size from being brought onboard flights between the United States and the Russian Federation in any passenger cabin of service. Additionally, the security directive requires passengers traveling between the United States and the Russian Federation to do an in-person check in with an airline representative at the airport.

During briefings with the Committee prior to commencing preclearance operations at Abu Dhabi International Airport, representatives from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) repeatedly asserted that preclearance operations at Abu Dhabi International Airport were critical to our domestic security in light of the high threat nature of the passengers transiting through Abu Dhabi International Airport. Given what the Committee has been told about the high threat nature associated with transit at the Abu Dhabi International Airport, we are concerned that TSA decided to allow passengers arriving in the United States from Abu Dhabi International Airport to bypass domestic screening prior to boarding connecting flights in advance of final approval of passenger screening procedures in Abu Dhabi.

In an effort to better understand TSA's justification for its actions and pursuant to Rule X cl. 3(g) and Rule XI of the United States House of Representatives, please provide answers to the following questions by no later than February 25, 2014:

1. On what date did TSA first contemplate conducting a "soft launch" of aviation security preclearance for passengers traveling from Abu Dhabi International Airport to the United States? When was the final decision made?
2. What office within DHS made the decision to commence a "soft launch" of aviation security preclearance for passengers traveling from Abu Dhabi International Airport to the United States? Please list each office within DHS that was involved in the decision and include a description of that involvement.
3. Did the recent threat information that resulted in TSA issuing a security directive prohibiting liquids, gels, aerosols, and powders of any size from being onboard certain flights prompt the agency to reconsider commencing aviation security preclearance for passengers traveling to the United States from Abu Dhabi International Airport prior to formal certification of the screening in the U.A.E? If not, why not?
4. Are passengers flying to the United States from Abu Dhabi International Airport currently allowed to carry liquids, gels, aerosols, and powders onboard flights?
5. In light of the current threat environment, has TSA issued a security directive to the U.S.-bound carrier that flies out of the Abu Dhabi International Airport to require additional security practices?
6. In light of the recent changes to security procedures for flights to and from the Russian Federation, does TSA or other components of the Department maintain data on international travelers who transit to the United States from the Russian Federation via Abu Dhabi International Airport?
7. What legal remedy may the United States pursue should the screening at Abu Dhabi International Airport be shown to be below acceptable levels of security upon inspection by TSA?

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions about this request, please contact I. Lanier Avant, Staff Director at 202-226-2616.

Sincerely,



Bennie G. Thompson
Ranking Member



Cedric L. Richmond
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation Security

cc: The Honorable Michael T. McCaul, Chairman
The Honorable Richard Hudson, Chairman, Subcommittee on Transportation Security