

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Kathleen Rice

Subcommittee on Transportation Security

Hearing “Examining TSA’s Global Efforts to Protect the Homeland from Aviation Threats and Enhance Security at Last Point of Departure Airports”

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As we all know, on October 31 of this year, Metrojet Flight 9268 crashed over Sinai, Egypt after departing from Sharm al-Sheikh International Airport en route to Russia. Multiple sources have confirmed that a bomb smuggled onboard the aircraft caused the crash – killing 224 people.

Although Sharm Al- Sheikh is not a last point of departure airport in which US Carriers and TSA work, there have been reports that security within the airport was weak. And those security concerns contributed to Britain’s decision to suspend all flights to and from Sharm Al-Sheikh in the immediate aftermath of the crash.

The attacks in Paris and the shootings last week in California are the latest tragedies to remind us that the threat of terrorist attacks is very real and the risk is very high right now – and the Metrojet bombing is a reminder that commercial flight are still a major target for terrorism.

We have to be going above and beyond right now in our efforts to protect the American people – and part of that effort includes making sure that international airports with flights bound for the United States are fully complying with all aviation security standards, and that TSA and all relevant parties share all information about terrorist threats and security concerns.

There are currently 308 last point of departure airports in the world, and every day more than 2,000 flights travel from foreign countries to the United States. TSA’s Office of Global Strategies (OGS) operates throughout Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. And TSA Representatives operate in countries with airports deemed critical to our national security.

OGS recurrently certifies these airports by conducting security assessments, and has deemed them low-risk for outbound flights to travel directly to the United States. They are on the ground annually conducting more than 120 foreign airport assessments, 1,800 air carrier inspections, and 700 foreign repair station audits.

It seems that OGS’s methods are working efficiently, but we cannot afford to get comfortable or complacent right now – because again, the Metrojet bombing is all the indication we need to know that there are terrorist groups and radical individuals targeting commercial aviation.

Mr. Terrell, in your testimony you mentioned the security directives and the emergency amendments that were coordinated at eight LPD airports in response to the Metrojet crash. I’m eager to hear more about the measures taken in response to this crash, although I know we’ll have to have that discussion in a secure setting.

I appreciate Administrator Neffenger acting quickly to issue needed directives and amendments that will help eliminate any perceived vulnerabilities at last point of departure airports. I am pleased to know that OGS participates in multilateral forums with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and many others.

I think this collaboration is a testament to the fact that international aviation security is an ongoing, inclusive effort and that your office is being proactive with your approach to enhancing security on international flights.