



COMMITTEE *ON* HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

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Subcommittee Hearing Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Protecting the Homeland – Examining TSA’s Relationships with U.S. Adversaries

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International aviation represents a tremendous engine of the global economy. According to the Department of Transportation, in calendar year 2023, more than 237 million passengers traveled by air between the United States and the rest of the world. Historically, flights inbound to the United States from abroad have also represented the biggest threat to our Nation’s aviation system.

Since TSA’s creation following the September 11th attacks, many of the most troubling plots against aviation have emanated from overseas, from the 2009 underwear bomber and the 2010 printer cartridge device to more recent threats involving powders and personal electronic devices.

TSA’s efforts to ensure sufficient security at foreign airports—where TSA does not conduct screening itself—are critical to economic development, tourism, trade, and employment around the world. TSA’s engagements with foreign partners improve security through the air transportation environment—not just for American travelers, but for travelers worldwide by raising the global baseline for security standards.

TSA pursues multilateral and bilateral engagements to advance the adoption of security measures related to explosives detection, cybersecurity, passenger and employee vetting, and technological advancement. By working directly with foreign government counterparts, TSA pushes for security advancements that benefit all passengers traveling through a foreign airport, not just those departing for the United States.

When an airport’s screening practices do not meet U.S. standards, TSA imposes regulatory requirements on carriers servicing direct flights to the United States, ensuring that carriers conduct gate screening to augment standard checkpoint screening. With more than 300 airports in more than 100 countries offering direct flights to the United States, TSA’s efforts to safeguard all international inbound flights are extensive and complex.

TSA does not have the luxury to choose whether to engage with the foreign government of a country with direct flights to the United States. If a foreign airport has direct flights to the United States, the law requires TSA to provide for the security of those flights. Efforts by some of my colleagues to paint TSA’s engagements with certain foreign governments as somehow suspect or dangerous are disingenuous at best.

I struggle to understand why routine diplomatic engagements that have occurred regularly for more than a decade under the administrations of both parties should suddenly be viewed as scandalous when conducted by the current administration. Some of my colleagues have gone so far as to introduce legislation that would effectively ban representatives of certain foreign governments from U.S. airports. Such a bill, if enacted, would be incredibly dangerous, as it would endanger TSA’s ability to access foreign airports with direct flights to the United States to assess their security. Millions of passengers

could be left to travel on flights the U.S. government cannot attest are secure. That would be far worse for our national security than allowing a few vetted, escorted Cuban officials to observe some TSA officers screening a few passengers and bags.

TSA is doing exactly what the law requires: engaging with foreign governments to secure international aviation. I hope today's hearing will make clear the absurdity of raking TSA over the coals for doing exactly what Congress directed the agency to do.

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