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

Securing Air Cargo: Industry Perspectives

Subcommittee on Transportation & Protective Security

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DHS Secretary John Kelly has described the threat to aviation as “sophisticated” and “very real.” I concur with Secretary Kelly’s assessment of the aviation threat. That said, the demands of the ever-evolving threat environment demand that TSA not only give significant attention to passenger screening but also be vigilant about other aviation security threats—such as those related to air cargo.

The threat to air cargo came into full view in 2010 when Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) designed a plot in which explosives hidden within printer cartridges were to be detonated on US bound aircraft. If successful, this plot would have killed innocent people and caused catastrophic economic disruption.

As AQAP explained in its online magazine, Inspire, “It is such a good bargain . . . to spread fear amongst the enemy and keep him on his toes in exchange of a few months of work and a few thousand bucks.”

Well before the 2010 AQAP air cargo plot, Congress recognized the need to bolster air cargo security. Next week will mark the tenth anniversary of the enactment of the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007, legislation I authored that then-President George W. Bush signed into law. A key provision of this comprehensive homeland security law was a mandate that all cargo on domestic and international inbound passenger planes be screened.

TSA and the stakeholder community deserve a lot of credit for coming together to develop an approach to implementation that, since 2012, has kept air passengers secure from the threat of a cargo-based explosion. While I have been pleased with all that was done to achieve the mandate, more must be done.

It is my hope that today’s hearing will be a part of an ongoing conversation that will help us identify opportunities where TSA can work better with cargo stakeholders to further enhance security and operations.

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