



# COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## Hearing Statement of Transportation & Maritime Security Subcommittee Ranking Member Shri Thanedar (D-MI)

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

**July 9, 2024**

Since the agency’s inception, TSA has worked to ensure the security of flights from foreign airports into the United States. Under the Biden administration, TSA continues to carry out a range of activities to secure international aviation, from engagements with the International Civil Aviation Organization and other diplomatic bodies, to managing bilateral relationships with foreign government counterparts, to issuing security requirements for air carriers flying into the United States from foreign airports and inspecting them for compliance.

To have confidence in the security of all flights entering the United States from abroad, TSA **must** maintain access to inspect security efforts at foreign airports to ensure they meet U.S. standards. Terrorist threats to U.S. aviation have originated primarily overseas, so ensuring flights inbound to the U.S. are screened to TSA’s standards is paramount to the agency’s security mission.

Maintaining access to foreign airports requires diplomacy and reciprocity—including with our Nation’s adversaries if they have direct flights to the United States. In fact, our adversaries’ airports with direct flights to the United States are perhaps the **most important** locations for TSA to inspect. In the case of the recent visit of Cuban government officials to Miami International Airport, I understand TSA has apologized for not notifying local officials in advance of the visit and has pledged to do so for future visits. That said, TSA and the Administration have a responsibility under the law to ensure the security of commercial flights from Cuba to the United States, and doing so requires providing some level of reciprocity.

For this visit, TSA and the State Department vetted the Cuban officials, escorted them throughout their tour, and did not share any sensitive or classified information. Cuban officials have been regularly visiting U.S. airports for over a decade without incident, under administrations of both parties. Notably, TSA hosted Cuban officials for a visit in 2018 under the Trump Administration, and there was no outcry from Republican politicians then. Commercial flights between Cuba and the United States have brought benefits to both countries.

During the past year, approximately 2.4 million passengers have traveled between Cuba and the United States, providing opportunities for tourism and family connections which serve as critical lifelines to many people during Cuba’s ongoing economic and humanitarian challenges. Denying Cuban officials the opportunity to visit U.S. airports would put at risk the security of air passengers, ultimately harming the Cuban and American people far more than the Cuban government. International engagement fosters cooperation—even between adversaries—when there is shared interest in mutually beneficial outcomes.

I am confident TSA will not back down from fulfilling its responsibility to secure international aviation solely because some of my colleagues are using the agency as a scapegoat to score cheap political points. International air travel is critical to the global economy, and its security must never be compromised. I

look forward to hearing more from our witnesses about TSA's engagements with Cuba, as well as TSA's work with other countries around the globe.

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