

TESTIMONY OF

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COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM**

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Good morning Chairman Waxman, Ranking Member Davis, and distinguished members of the Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to discuss with you the overall strategy of airport security screening and to address the recommendations of the Government Accountability Office (GAO) in its testimony to this Committee on Transportation Security Administration (TSA) security screening checkpoints at commercial airports.

Before I address the specific issues and recommendations in the GAO testimony, I want to say that I am very appreciative of the frank and open communication that has been established between GAO and TSA. GAO has provided TSA with insightful and constructive information on a number of programs that has helped improve the transportation security for our nation. We look forward to continuing this cooperative approach.

Although GAO's stated intent in its testimony was to not evaluate the overall effectiveness of the multi-layered security framework protecting the aviation system, I believe one cannot adequately evaluate the effectiveness of any single layer of security, in this case the passenger screening checkpoint, without understanding the context of each layer within the risk-based and multi-layered approach to security.

Risk Management Based on Threat

TSA's security strategy requires a broad range of interlinked measures that are flexible, mobile, and unpredictable. To counter the evolving threat and adaptive capabilities of terrorists, we are updating the entire screening process and changing the legacy systems that originated in the 1970s. We are proactive and we must continue to anticipate the threats.

We recognize that we cannot protect every person or all property against every possible threat to the system. Given the nature of the threats to aviation, we must manage risk consistent with what we understand of the threats, vulnerabilities, and consequences. Risk-based security means that we share resources across all risks, both high and low, in

strategic proportions. The President's National Strategy for Homeland Security, updated last month, reaffirmed this approach:

Recognizing that the future is uncertain and that we cannot envision or prepare for every potential threat, we must understand and accept a certain level of risk as a permanent condition. Managing homeland security risk requires a disciplined approach to resource prioritization and the diversification of protective responsibilities across the full spectrum of our Nation's homeland security partners.

Layers of Security

The discussion of aviation security almost always starts at the familiar TSA security checkpoint. For the two million travelers a day who fly, that is TSA to them. However, TSA looks at the checkpoint as but a piece – an important piece – of a much larger picture. Because of that larger picture, TSA looks at the entire aviation system in evaluating risk, including threat information. A large part of TSA's work involves working closely on a daily basis with the intelligence and law enforcement communities and our global partners to try to stay ahead of the current threat.

Aviation security begins well before a passenger arrives at the airport.

1. U.S. government agencies work with others around the globe to identify and disrupt terrorist activities at their source.
2. U.S. Customs and Border Protection activities further identify potential terrorists and bar their entry into the United States.
3. Federal, State, and local law enforcement work together with the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Joint Terrorism Task Forces across the United States to identify and disrupt terrorist activities within the United States.
4. A No-Fly system is used to prevent anyone known to an agency of the U.S. government to be a threat to aviation from flying into, within or out of the United States. The Secure Flight program, once fully implemented, will greatly increase the effectiveness of the passenger vetting process.
5. Airline flight crews and airport employees who have access to an aircraft are subject to additional vetting in addition to the No-Fly analysis.

These first five security elements mean that anybody known to U.S. intelligence or law enforcement agencies that are a threat to aviation never get close to an airplane.

6. An additional, risk-based computer-assisted pre-screening of passengers is conducted before a boarding pass is issued.

TSA continues to change what we do, how we do it, and where we do it. We have significantly increased the layers of security throughout the airport environment. Within airports themselves, TSA is focusing beyond the physical checkpoint—to push our borders out, so to speak—to look more at people and to identify those with hostile intent or those conducting surveillance even if they are not carrying a prohibited item. By spreading our layers of security throughout the airport environment and elsewhere, we have multiple opportunities to detect terrorists and leverage the capabilities of our workforce, our partners, and our technology.

7. Hundreds of canine teams and local law enforcement officers are working at airports across the country to identify suspicious articles or people.
8. In airports nationwide, specially trained Behavior Detection Officers look for suspicious behavior as part of the Screening Passengers by Observation Techniques (SPOT) program. Individuals exhibiting specific observable behaviors may be referred for additional screening at the checkpoint that can include questioning, handwanding, pat down, or physical inspection of their carry-on baggage. SPOT adds an element of unpredictability to the security screening process that is easy for passengers to navigate but difficult for terrorists to manipulate.
9. Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response (VIPR) teams have been more broadly deployed beginning this past summer. Comprised of Transportation Security Officers (TSO), Transportation Security Inspectors (TSI), and Federal Air Marshals (FAM), VIPR teams collaborate with local law enforcement agencies to intensify the visible presence of security personnel at various points throughout the transportation system. At airports, we use VIPR teams in locations away from the screening checkpoint.

All of this happens before a passenger even shows up at a TSA checkpoint.

10. At the checkpoint, we placed specially trained TSOs at the front of the checkpoint to review travel documents to search for fraudulent identification (IDs) and also to look at behavior. We are continuing to develop methods that will make it harder for dangerous people to use fraudulent documents and IDs by raising the standard of inspection and providing additional equipment for our TSOs to perform this function.
11. A professional, well-trained, experienced team of TSOs, assisted by multiple technologies, screens passengers and their carry-on bags for weapons and explosives. Well-trained and experienced law enforcement partners support TSA's checkpoint activities with deployments of officers as well as canine teams.
12. We hired and deployed over 100 Bomb Appraisal Officers (BAO) who provide advanced training for the workforce on explosives and improvised explosive devices (IED) and resolve alarms beyond the TSO capability. We plan to hire and deploy an additional 200 BAOs in 2008. BAOs have extensive backgrounds and

experience in IEDs as well as in Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear threats. They work closely with local law enforcement, bomb squads, and military Explosive Ordnance Disposal personnel to satisfy TSA's explosives detection needs.

13. In the baggage area, similarly well-trained, experienced TSOs use a variety of technologies to screen baggage, and, when necessary, physically search baggage to resolve anomalies.

Then, on the aircraft:

14. Thousands of FAMs fly discreetly on a very significant number of flights, both domestic and international.
15. Thousands of pilots who undergo special training and become Federal Flight Deck Officers are authorized and ready to protect the cockpit with firearms.
16. All flight and cabin crewmembers receive mandatory security training, through their air carrier, on protecting the aircraft and addressing various threat conditions. TSA provides additional training, on a voluntary basis, for cabin crewmembers in self defense techniques.
17. Other local, State, and Federal law enforcement officers travel armed as part of their normal duties and are prepared to intervene.
18. Hardened cockpit doors prevent unauthorized access to the flight deck.
19. And sitting on every airplane are passengers who remember the courage and commitment of the men and women on United Flight 93, and who are prepared to act, if necessary.

Each and every one of these 19 security layers is important and strong in its own right; linked together, they are effective and daunting.

Relying solely on security at the checkpoint or focusing all of our resources to defeat one threat is counterproductive and detracts from our overall mission. The 9/11 Commission recommended a layered security system saying: "No single security measure is foolproof. Accordingly, the TSA must have multiple layers of security in place to defeat the more plausible and dangerous forms of attack against public transportation." (p.392).

We recognize that, despite our efforts to make each layer as strong as possible, a concerted effort may target any one layer. Our ongoing success is a result of the tremendous power in the reinforced, multiple layers. Truly, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts -- and, together, they are formidable.

This strategy of active, nimble, flexible security depends on the quality of the people involved. The success of all these programs in increasing the layers of security would not be possible without the incredible effort, professionalism, and dedication shown by TSA's workforce. Our highly trained and highly motivated workforce--TSOs, TSIs, FAMs, and other professionals--have proven to be an adaptable workforce that can quickly adjust to counter an emerging terrorist threat.

TSOs are required to complete at least 40 hours of classroom and 60 hours of on-the-job training prior to becoming a fully certified TSO. TSA has allocated over 3 million hours for TSO recurrent training in the 2008 fiscal year.

In August of 2006, TSOs employed new standard operating procedures within hours to deal with the threat identified as part of the United Kingdom (UK) plot to blow up commercial aircraft with liquid explosives. We are constantly reviewing and adjusting our procedures and strategies to ensure our personnel are ahead of the next threat.

The work of TSA's frontline workforce is also supported by our Explosives Operations Division, consisting of former bomb technicians to address terrorist explosives threats in all transportation modes. The Division consists of 33 seasoned Explosives Security Specialists providing a knowledgeable and robust source of explosives security expertise and training.

GAO Investigation Results and Recommendations

TSA's mission at screening checkpoints is to prevent items from entering sterile areas of airports and, ultimately, onto aircraft that pose a catastrophic risk to the passengers and crew. We know the threat facing our country and we execute our mission with the effort, expertise and resolve necessary to counter the threat. We screen over two million passengers and their carry-on bags every day. Despite the large volume, we know that an effective security system requires our screening to focus on every person and every bag, one at a time.

TSA originally prohibited liquids, gels, and aerosols (LGA) in August 2006 as a result of the threat identified in the UK plot. The immediate nature of the threat required TSA to impose a virtual ban on all LGAs, with very limited exceptions, to allow the airline industry to continue to operate. We implemented the new procedures, literally, in the middle of the night and within only a few hours. Approximately six weeks later, TSA was able to modify the ban on LGAs based on information learned from the UK investigation, testing of liquid explosives, and our ability to implement additional security measures at airports. The modified ban, which largely continues as our current policy, allows for LGAs in individual containers of 3.4 ounces or less that fit comfortably in a single one quart-sized clear plastic bag—commonly referred to as the “3-1-1” rule. The combination of all the layers of security and TSA's screening process provide effective security of the aviation system and allow passengers to bring minimal amounts of LGAs during their travel on aircraft.

We recognize that TSA needs to continue its ongoing efforts to improve passenger screening. We are treating very seriously the valuable results and information provided by the GAO from their investigation. We agree that TSA will need to continue to focus its attention on its overall screening process. The GAO results will help TSA formulate appropriate courses of action to improve this particular layer of security.

TSA concurs with the concept of the first suggestion that it establish special screening lines for persons with special needs and those carrying LGAs that are not subject to the “3-1-1” requirement. TSA will explore whether such a proposal is feasible without impairing our ability to perform our mission for other travelers. TSA always stands ready to assist any person with special needs through the screening process, as we do every day when such situations are presented.

TSA concurs with the second suggestion to introduce more aggressive, visible, and unpredictable security measures and has already begun to take such action. This suggestion is entirely consistent with our approach to security and we will continue to expand the unpredictable nature of our security measures.

TSA concurs with the final suggestion to continue to develop and deploy new technology. We are testing and deploying new technology that is greatly improving our effectiveness in detecting prohibited items. A lesson from 9/11 is that we must be proactive—we must anticipate threats that continue to grow in sophistication and complexity. This effort includes leveraging the skills of our TSOs with new technology. This next generation of technology will assist our TSOs in separating friend from foe, increasing efficiency, and helping minimize the impact to travelers and businesses:

- Whole Body Imagers. We are field testing whole body imagers, such as the backscatter and millimeter wave technologies, to quickly and safely screen passengers for prohibited items without the need for physical contact. Field testing is underway at Phoenix, and test sites will be expanded to two other major airports in early 2008.
- Bottled Liquids Scanners. After recently completing field testing at six major airports, we have purchased and are deploying over 200 bottled liquids scanning devices at checkpoints, and are now using a hand-held liquids scanner for non-checkpoint screening locations.
- Hand-Held Explosives Scanners. In the 3rd quarter of the 2007 fiscal year, we purchased 23 hand-held explosives scanners to supplement the over 50 devices now in use. These devices are mobile and can be used for explosives detection at non-checkpoint locations.
- Advanced Technology (AT) X-ray. We have recently completed field testing of AT X-ray equipment for carry-on baggage at four airports. This technology will provide TSOs with enhanced capability to identify and detect threats through improved imagery and analysis tools. We will begin deploying these systems in 2008.
- Checkpoint Automated Carry-On Explosives Detection Systems (Auto-EDS). We are field testing Auto-EDS for inspecting carry-on items at four additional

airports, and we have plans to test these systems' capabilities to inspect both carry-on and checked baggage at smaller airports. Auto-EDS supports enhanced threat detection through computed tomography x-ray, 3-D imagery and automated explosives and weapons detection. A limited quantity of these systems is expected to be deployed in 2008.

- Cast & Prosthesis Scanner. After completing field testing at three airports, we have purchased cast and prosthesis scanners to provide a safe, dignified, and non-invasive way to identify potential threats and clear passengers wearing casts, braces, and prosthetic devices. Deployment activities for these units are expected to begin in 2008.

Given the adaptive nature of terrorists, our pursuit of new technology is not limited to what I described today. We will continue to explore additional technologies to maintain our evolving ability to detect prohibited items at checkpoints.

Ensuring That Screening Effectiveness Continues to Improve

Since it assumed responsibility for the screening at airports, TSA has always recognized the value and importance of covert testing to measure TSA's screening performance and identify areas that require improvement. TSA's Office of Inspection conducts ongoing covert tests at every commercial airport nationwide to identify specific vulnerabilities in TSA screening operations.

Further, TSA recognized that we needed a more systematic framework to more accurately assess the effectiveness of our screening process and identify which aspects of the process that require improvement given the millions of passengers and carryon bags screened everyday across hundreds of airports. In April of this year, we therefore established the Aviation Screening Assessment Program (ASAP) to greatly expand our internal covert testing and provide statistically sound data to support operational decisions. This program has performed thousands of covert tests at hundreds of airports nationwide in just six months. We are testing virtually every aspect of the screening process, to include the detection of prohibited liquids. Under separate training programs, TSA additionally conducts over a thousand more focused covert tests for IEDs and almost 70,000 electronic image tests—*every day*. Our TSOs are among the most tested workforce in the country. TSOs are literally tested every day, on every shift, at every checkpoint in every lane across over 400 airports around the United States. The information produced collectively from these programs will enable TSA to make more informed decisions based on reliable data to better target our efforts to improve the screening process. ASAP will enhance our ability to identify which category of the screening process needs improvement: operations; procedures; technology; training; or management. We now have a formal process to conduct a thorough assessment of the screening process every six months and implement the appropriate courses of action to address any concerns revealed during the expansive covert testing.

Conclusion

The security of our homeland and the aviation system is based on a risk-based approach involving multiple layers of security. Although each individual layer may never be 100 percent impenetrable, the effectiveness afforded by the collective layers of security provides a formidable defense against those who wish to do us harm. TSA's passenger screening process must always continue to improve its ability to detect certain prohibited items. The nation's aviation system remains secure—but requires ongoing improvement and vigilance to stay ahead of the threat of terrorism.

Due to the public setting of this hearing, I am unable to provide the Committee, at this time, more specific explanations of TSA's security measures that involve sensitive or classified national security information; however, I would be glad to provide additional information to this Committee in the appropriate setting.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony, and I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you may have.

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