



HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

Statement of Subcommittee Chairman John Katko (R-NY) Transportation and Protective Security Subcommittee

“Securing Air Cargo: Industry Perspectives”

July 25, 2017

Remarks as Prepared

Terrorists are relentless in their efforts to target aviation. No matter how much we improve our security posture, they are always willing to adjust and pursue new ways to hurt us, and as the recent laptop threat illustrates, terrorists’ capability and persistence to target aviation is still very real today.

Despite the creation of TSA and DHS—and the major improvements to passenger screening and security after 9/11—our enemies have continued to find new avenues for attack. However, we as a nation have always faced these challenges head on, and dedicated ourselves to harnessing innovation and collaboration in order to mitigate the threat. Our efforts to enhance cargo security demonstrate this dedication and resilience.

In October 2010, two explosive devices concealed in cargo packages were discovered on separate flights originating in Yemen and bound for the United States. These explosives—disguised as printer cartridges—were only found after being transported on both passenger and cargo flights, thanks to a tip from Saudi Arabian intelligence.

We know all too well what the threat to passenger aircraft can do, and has done, to affect air travel and our global economy. The 9/11 attacks led to major overhauls of our transportation and aviation security sectors. Initially, the attacks made people less inclined to travel and feel less confident in the government’s ability to stay ahead of the numerous threats facing the country.

The potential impact is nearly identical for cargo security. Terrorists do not discriminate between a passenger plane and a cargo plane. They just want the image of a Western plane being brought down. And their desired impact is still the same—that it will change our way of life, instill fear in the American people, and leave us questioning our existing security infrastructure. While bringing down a cargo plane may not lead to the same number of casualties as a passenger plane, it can have a broader impact on our open and free society—leading to more regulations, slower supply chain operations, and major economic damage.

Air cargo is crucial to the global economy. Thirty-five percent of the total world trade value is carried by air. And over the next 20 years, it’s predicted that world air cargo traffic will grow 4.2 percent per year. Air cargo will remain a huge part of the modern, globalized economy, which is why it is absolutely paramount that we do all we can to protect it.

In order to continue our efforts to protect and secure air cargo, the government and industry must work together and maintain a constant dialogue. While cooperation is essential for all aviation security, it is especially important for cargo, where every security decision made has a direct impact on the economy. We need the manufacturers, shippers, freight forwarders, and everyone else involved in the supply chain to engage with Congress and DHS to explain how security decisions are impacting their businesses and what else can be done to address potential vulnerabilities.

I commend DHS for working with industry and seeking input as it aims to stay one step ahead of the threats we face on a daily basis. While we in Congress often blame the bureaucracy of the executive agencies, DHS has made a concerted effort to think creatively in the cargo security space. The Certified Cargo Screening Program and the use of canines and technologies for domestic screening, as well as the Air Cargo Advance Screening pilot program and the National Cargo Security Program for international screening, are evidence of the innovative ways TSA is approaching air cargo security.

However, there is always more that can be done and many questions that need to be answered. Is TSA adapting fast enough to the evolving security threats and economic issues involved in air cargo? Are there new technologies that could improve both security and supply chain speed? Why are third party canine teams not authorized for screening cargo, especially where certain technologies are incapable?

This is where Congress can assist. As you are all aware, this Committee addressed many of these issues in our bipartisan DHS Authorization bill that overwhelmingly passed the House last week. The Authorization bill mandates permanent implementation of the Air Cargo Advance Screening program, which will ensure that CBP and TSA have access to important security data and enhanced ability to protect against threats to air cargo. The bill also directs TSA to issue standards for certifying third party canines for use in the air cargo sector. This will expand the number of canines available for cargo screening and enhance security in an operationally efficient manner. We appreciate the input from all of our witnesses today as we seek to improve the security of the homeland, especially the air cargo sector.

We believe these improvements in the DHS Authorization bill will have positive impacts on both the security and efficiency of the air cargo sector. But we know there may be more that can be addressed. We ask all of our witnesses today to continue to do what you have always done—give us your honest feedback and perspective on the challenges we still face with air cargo and what else can be done to improve both security and industry operations. We must maintain an open dialogue and continue to support a strong collaboration between industry and government, in order to successfully mitigate this very real threat.

I thank all of you for being here today and for your continued support and engagement with this Committee.

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