

REDUCING AIR CARGO SECURITY VULNERABILITY

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When most people think of anti-terrorism and air security, they primarily think of a September 11th situation where terrorists target a passenger plane, hijack it, and proceed to use it as a weapon. Alternatively, they may think of a hostage situation where a plane is hijacked, and the passengers are held hostage while a series of demands are made. Those, however, are not the only threats from air travel. Air cargo is, itself, topic of concern for the security community as they too could either be detonated in the air or hijacked and used as mass casualty weapons. In fact, some of the concern for cargo security exists because of the enhanced screening and passenger vetting that has occurred on travel into and within the United States since the September 11th attacks. The threat from cargo exists both on planes carrying only cargo and amongst cargo that travels with passengers; however, it is believed that cargo-only traffic is considered less of a threat. The primary threat posed by cargo-only traffic is hijackings; whereas, explosives are large concern for cargo traveling with passengers.

To improve cargo security, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) have developed a risk-based vetting system known as the Air Cargo Advanced Screening (ACAS) system. While, the government has mandated that all cargo placed on passenger planes be screened, the ACAS is a system that, during its pilot, has demonstrated effectiveness by requiring the filing of key data elements about the cargo prior to departure. The data elements that CBP requires to be submitted are air waybill number, shipper name, shipper address, consignee name, consignee address, description, quantity, and weight. This data suffices to build a relative risk profile for the package and then, if the risk is high, the cargo is then screened more thoroughly. CBP then runs the data through a threat-assessment system and, if flagged, sets aside certain items for further screening. The pilot itself has been going since 2010 and has allowed for multiple stakeholders to comment on the effectiveness of the system which has been, according to pilot participants, been positive. The government, when it mandated in June 2018, the requirement that all cargo entering the United States be subjected to the ACAS, noted that the program, when it was still a pilot, had successfully identified shipments that potentially were tied to terrorism.

In addition to the ACAS system, the CBP has engaged with Unisys to develop the Targeting and Analysis Program Directorate (TASPD). This system will use analytics and biometrics to assist in automatically identify low-risk packages that can be screened relatively lightly,

> **“Explosives and/or weapons contained in air cargo could potentially be detonated during flight. Such a terrorist attack could result in destruction of the aircraft, serious injuries or death to passengers and crew, and potential ground-level victims or targets.**

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The CBP and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) have since 2010 carried out a pilot program to test whether filing the information before loading had helped identify security threats.

The Air Cargo Advanced Screening (ACAS) pilot has been successful in enabling CBP to identify a substantial amount of high-risk cargo.

Significantly, CBP has identified a substantial number of air cargo shipments that have potential ties to terrorism and, therefore, may represent a threat.

When this high-risk cargo is identified, enhanced cargo screening is performed pursuant to TSA-approved or accepted security programs."

Source: https://www.aircargonews.net/news/policy/air-cargo-security/single-view/news/us-implements-acas-security-requirements.html

Soundbite analytics

- Air freight only accounted for .05% of shipments to US destinations; however, freight shipments were 6.1% of the value.
- By 2017, air cargo shipments passed levels prior to the 2007 recession.
- From 2016-2017, air cargo activity has increased 10%.
- The TSA has noted that Switzerland, South Africa, Japan, Canada, Australia, Israel, South Korea, and South Africa account for 70% of air cargo that comes into the USA from other countries.

SOURCES

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