



United States Senate

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Chairman Joseph I. Lieberman, ID-Conn.

Opening Statement for Chairman Joseph Lieberman
Hearing, "Closing the Gaps in Air Cargo Security"
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee
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Good afternoon, the hearing will come to order. Our subject today is air cargo security.

Beginning with the attack against America on 9-11, our terrorist enemies have consistently sought to use airplanes as weapons of mass destruction. And they have seen in our aviation system a strategic choke point of international transit and commerce that could be brought to a halt through terror attacks.

We've seen shoe bombers. Liquid bombers. Underwear bombers. Again and again and again, terrorists have sought different ways to blow up an airplane. In the most recent attempt, terrorists hid bombs inside the toner cartridges of printers and sent them to the U.S. as air cargo.

This plot, as the others before it, was thwarted – in this case, largely because of extraordinary intelligence—and here we give thanks and credit to our friends and allies in Saudi Arabia. But, there was in this an element of good fortune and luck.

And luck, of course, is not a strategy to defend our nation from the threat of terrorists.

As this most recent plot demonstrates, good intelligence and strong foreign partnerships are critically important. But I think the point that remains with us is that phrase that echoes from the 9-11 Report, the Kean-Hamilton Report, in which they said 9-11 occurred because of a "failure of imagination" - our failure to imagine that people could possibly try to do what the terrorists did to us on 9-11. Every time one of these events happens it compels us to figure out how we can better anticipate terrorists' next move, not just react to the last one.

Former TSA Administrator and Deputy Secretary of DHS, Admiral James Loy, recently said in an op-ed in *The Washington Post* that after the 9-11 hijackings, we hardened cockpit doors.

Then the terrorists tried a shoe bomb and now we remove our shoes for inspection at airports.

Then the terrorists tried liquid explosives hidden in sports drinks, targeting seven planes flying over the Atlantic Ocean, and we cracked down on liquids that could be brought on board.

Then the underwear bomber came close to bringing down a plane over Detroit, and now we've gone to full body imaging. And of course I support every one of those steps.

Now terrorists are going after a weak spot in cargo inspections, and we will respond to that, as well we should. But they—our enemies—will keep looking for new vulnerabilities. And we have got to continue to try to go out and raise our defenses before they strike.

We were lucky – as I've said – that none of these attempts succeeded. But, we will continue to probe our weaknesses, attempting to detect our flaws, and then defending against them. And we have to make sure that not only does our luck not run out, but we're prepared to stop whatever they try.

Here's some of the questions I'd like to ask our witnesses today:

Clearly both the gathering of intelligence and acting on it is crucial. And I want to ask, how we can improve our intelligence beyond where it is now? Intelligence is always important in war, never more important

than in the particular war with Islamist extremist terrorists we are fighting today, for all the reasons that I've just talked about.

Threats of terrorism come from within the United States, or from abroad. Our ability to deter, detect or intercept that foreign threat here is limited, by our own sovereignty.

We must depend upon our foreign partners to implement strong security programs.

And I want to ask both of you what we're doing to strengthen those relationships, and implement international security programs. We have limited direct control over incoming passenger flights and cargo flights.

While our government has achieved 100 percent screening of air cargo on domestic passenger flights—which is a significant accomplishment, consistent with the 9-11 legislation we adopted--only about 60 percent of cargo on passenger flights coming into the United States from abroad is screened. And there's a kind of patchwork system for all cargo aircrafts. So we want to ask how we can improve that, and convince our foreign countries to expand and accelerate their screening of cargo coming either on passenger flights or cargo flights to the United States.

Right now we require air carriers coming from Europe, Asia, Africa and South America to provide cargo manifest information after the plane has taken off, four hours before it's due to arrive.

Can't we move that timeline up? Is there additional or different information that may be helpful in identifying high risk cargo?

And finally, how are we preparing to identify the next gap terrorists will likely try to exploit? Do we have an institutional way? As difficult, unprecedented, and threatening to our homeland security this is, we need to try to think ahead of them.

Our witnesses today are, of course, ideally positioned by the offices they hold now and their experience to help answer these questions: TSA Administrator John Pistole and Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Alan Bersin.

I thank both of them for being here and I look forward to your testimony.
Senator Collins.