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# TSA issues emergency order focused on cargo from 5 countries

CBS News

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9 hrs ago

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Terror concerns prompt TSA order on air cargo from five mostly-Muslim countries



Growing concern about terrorists getting a bomb onto a plane headed for the United States prompted an emergency order requiring stricter scrutiny of air cargo by TSA Administrator David Pekoske. Effective Monday morning, all cargo being loaded onto flights at last point of departure airports in five predominately Muslim countries — Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates — will be subject to the new requirements.

"These countries were chosen because of a demonstrated intent by terrorist groups to attack aviation from them," said a TSA official familiar with the order. "This is all intel driven."

Last year, these countries were among those subject to the so-called laptop ban that prohibited electronics larger than a cell phone to be carried on in the passenger cabin.

"In close coordination with CBP, I directed specific carriers to implement strict security requirements based upon recent information that established a need to implement additional security measures for air cargo bound to the United States, on both passenger and cargo aircraft," Pekoske said in a statement to CBS News.

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Six airlines — EgyptAir, Royal Jordanian, Qatar, Saudi, Emirates and Etihad — serving the U.S. from seven airports are now required to comply with Air Cargo Advance Screening protocols. Known as ACAS, it is typically a voluntary program, that provides the TSA and Customs and Border Protection with advanced information about all cargo those carriers plan to bring to the United States.

The airports subject to the order include Cairo International Airport in Egypt, Queen Alia International Airport in Jordan, King Abdul-Aziz International Airport and King Khalid International Airport in Saudi Arabia, Doha International Airport in Qatar, as well as Dubai International Airport and Abu Dhabi International Airport in the U.A.E.

All cargo loaded on an airplane already undergoes security screening. The new measures will give TSA and CBP specific additional information in advance of cargo being loaded onto a U.S.-bound flight. The carriers will be required to provide details like where a parcel was sent from, who sent it, where it's been since it was mailed, how it was sent, where its going, and its contents. That is a similar level of "total asset visibility" that comes with a package sent through FedEx or UPS.

"Anomaly detection is the bottom line here," said a TSA official. "This helps us track those anomalies."

An example given by officials was someone spending \$500 to ship a \$100 printer that's already available in the U.S. from a country with terrorist activity through one of these five countries. Such a package would likely warrant a further inspection.

"Right now everything is screened, but in terms of us having advanced information of everything that's going on that plane, in a timely manner that's what's really new here," a TSA official said.

Under this order, TSA and CBP can now mandate an air carrier perform secondary inspections of flagged cargo.

"It establishes a 24/7 relationship with those carriers so we can pick up the phone and say we need you to look at this...before the plane is loaded," the official said.

Turkey is the only other country required to participate in ACAS, an order that followed a failed terror plot to blow up an Australian airliner over the summer. High-grade military explosives were sent by air cargo from Turkey as part of that plot.

The emergency order, referred to by TSA officials as an emergency amendment, builds on continuing concern about a bomb concealed in a large personal electronic device like a laptop that may not be easily detectable by some screening equipment. Intelligence that ISIS had constructed such a device prompted the short lived laptop ban and resulted in a two phased increase of security at foreign airports with direct flights to the U.S.

"We haven't necessarily seen anything 'brand new' in terms of a new threat but we are seeing things and want to stay ahead of the threat that we've seen over the past nine months or so. There's enough out there, enough threat streams, that give us enough concern that we need to move forward with this as quickly as possible," said a TSA official familiar with the current threat intelligence.

The Trump administration is considering making all air cargo bound for the U.S. subject to these rules. At least 70 percent of that cargo is moved by carriers who voluntarily comply, but the level of compliance can vary.

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