



Highlights of [GAO-07-729](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) efforts to evaluate the security of foreign airports and air carriers that service the United States are of great importance, particularly considering that flights bound for the United States from foreign countries continue to be targets of coordinated terrorist activity, as demonstrated by the alleged August 2006 liquid explosives terrorist plot.

For this review, GAO evaluated the results of foreign airport and air carrier evaluations; actions taken and assistance provided by TSA when security deficiencies were identified; TSA's oversight of its foreign airport and air carrier evaluation programs; and TSA's efforts to address challenges in conducting foreign airport and air carrier evaluations. To conduct this work, GAO reviewed foreign airport and air carrier evaluation results and interviewed TSA officials, foreign aviation security officials, and air carrier representatives.

What GAO Recommends

In an April 2007 report that contained sensitive information, GAO recommended, and the Department of Homeland Security agreed, that TSA develop controls for tracking and documenting information and establish outcome-based performance measures to strengthen oversight of its foreign airport and air carrier evaluation programs.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-729

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Cathleen Berrick at (202) 512-3404 or berrickc@gao.gov.

AVIATION SECURITY

Foreign Airport Assessments and Air Carrier Inspections Help Enhance Security, but Oversight of These Efforts Can Be Strengthened

What GAO Found

Of the 128 foreign airports that TSA assessed during fiscal year 2005, TSA found that about 36 percent complied with all applicable security standards, while about 64 percent did not comply with at least one standard. The security deficiencies identified by TSA at two foreign airports were such that the Secretary of Homeland Security notified the public that the overall security at these airports was ineffective. Of the 529 overseas air carrier inspections conducted during fiscal year 2005, for about 71 percent, TSA did not identify any security violations, and for about 29 percent, TSA identified at least one security violation. TSA took enforcement action—warning letters, correction letters, or monetary fines—for about 18 percent of the air carrier security violations. TSA addressed most of the remaining 82 percent of security violations through on-site consultation.

TSA assisted foreign officials and air carrier representatives in addressing identified deficiencies through on-site consultation, recommendations for security improvements, and referrals for training and technical assistance. However, TSA's oversight of the foreign airport assessment and air carrier inspection programs could be strengthened. For example, TSA did not have adequate controls in place to track whether scheduled assessments and inspections were actually conducted, deferred, or canceled. TSA also did not always document foreign officials' progress in addressing security deficiencies identified by TSA. Further, TSA did not always track what enforcement actions were taken against air carriers with identified security deficiencies. TSA also did not have outcome-based performance measures to assess the impact of its assessment and inspection programs on the security of U.S.-bound flights. Without such controls, TSA may not have reasonable assurance that the foreign airport assessment and air carrier inspection programs are operating as intended.

TSA is taking action to address challenges that have limited its ability to conduct foreign airport assessments and air carrier inspections, including a lack of available inspectors, concerns regarding the resource burden placed on host governments as a result of frequent airport visits by TSA and others, and host government concerns regarding sovereignty. In October 2006, TSA began implementing a risk-based approach to scheduling foreign airport assessments, which should allow TSA to focus its limited inspector resources on higher-risk airports. TSA is also exploring opportunities to conduct joint airport assessments with the European Commission and use the results of airport assessments conducted by the European Commission to potentially adjust the frequency of TSA airport visits.