



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on July 3, 2014

Homeland Security to Increase Security on Overseas Flights Headed to U.S.

The Department of Homeland Security released a statement from DHS Secretary Jeh Johnson on July 2 stating: "I have directed TSA to implement enhanced security measures in the coming days at certain overseas airports with direct flights to the United States."

Jeh assured the public: "We will work to ensure these necessary steps pose as few disruptions to travelers as possible.... As always, we will continue to adjust security measures to promote aviation security without unnecessary disruptions to the traveling public."



Reuters reported that an unnamed U.S. official told the news agency that some of the new measures would involve additional inspections of passengers' shoes and property.

The official also said that the U.S. government had legal authority to enforce new security requirements at foreign governments or airports on flights that go directly to the United States.

In an interview on MSNBC's *The Rachel Maddow Show* on July 2, Johnson spoke about the changes in security procedures:

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We continually evaluate the world situation and we not infrequently make changes to aviation security. We either step it up or we feel sometimes we're in a position to dial it back and so this is something that happens periodically and people should not overreact to it or over-speculate about what's going on. But there clearly are concerns centered around aviation security that we need to be vigilant about. There is a terrorist threat to this country that remains, and I believe that counter-terrorism needs to be the cornerstone of our mission, our vast mission ... and aviation security is something that we still have a fair amount of concerns about.

ABC News reported on July 2 that U.S. officials learned earlier this year that members of the al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria — the Al Nusrah Front — as well as radicals from other groups were collaborating with elements of the Yemen-based al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which built devices to designed to circumvent security screening equipment, such as the "underwear bomb" that failed to detonate in a plane over Detroit on Christmas Day 2009.

The fact that the Al Nusrah Front (also known as Jabhar al-Nusra) is suspected of being behind the plot to create detection-proof bombs — against which the enhanced security measures are needed — raises a curious inconsistency about U.S. foreign policy and national security. And this factor is hardly obscure, since Reuters on July 3 cited a statement from an unnamed "national security source" that U.S. officials believe al-Nusra and AQAP operatives have tested new bomb designs in Syria, where al-Nusra



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is one of the main Islamist groups fighting to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad.

The very curious and inconsistent policies taken by our government related to our national interests and security stem from our backing of the motley collection of forces comprising the Free Syrian Army that are currently engaged in a civil war aimed at the overthrow of the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Though Assad is definitely an autocratic ruler, he is a largely secular Muslim with no strong agenda other than maintaining himself in control, not unlike Saddam Hussein. In contrast, the forces allied against him include a collection of some of the most radical Islamic extremists found anywhere. Yet the Obama administration has been providing aid to these rebels for well over a year. White House spokesman Josh Earnest admitted to reporters in March 2013: “[The United States has] provided some logistical nonlethal support that has also come in handy for the Syrian rebels who are, again, fighting a regime that is not hesitating to use the military might of that regime against its own people.”

Most major media reports have portrayed the Free Syrian Army as a group of patriots fighting to overthrow an evil regime, but the leading rebel groups are by no means free of radical influences.

For example, a *Washington Post* report on January 30, 2012 noted:

Syrian opposition leaders report an alarming growth within their ranks of fighters from Jabhar al-Nusra, an extremist group linked to al-Qaeda.... The al-Qaeda affiliate now accounts for 7.5 percent to 9 percent of the Free Syrian Army’s total fighters, up sharply from an estimated 3 percent three months ago and 1 percent at the beginning of the year.

In an article posted by *The New American* last September 17, Alex Newman cited a report from NBC News that stated:

While the U.S. already is providing money, equipment, training and limited weaponry to the Free Syrian Army (FSA), some U.S. military officials are growing increasingly concerned about the presence of extremist Islamic groups within the overall force. A U.S. military strike, even a limited one, could tip the balance in the civil war in favor of the rebels, they argue, potentially propelling these or other radical Islamic groups into a position of power in a post-Assad Syria.

An anonymous senior U.S. military official cited by NBC said that Pentagon officials estimate that extreme Islamist groups now constitute “more than 50 percent” of the rebel force, “and it’s growing by the day.”

Part of the rationale for Homeland Security to impose stricter pre-boarding security on foreign flights bound for the United States is that terrorists linked with the al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria — the Al Nusrah Front — are planning to build bombs that will evade present detection methods. And yet who has our government aided in the civil war against Assad? The Free Syrian Army, which is an ally of — the Al Nusrah Front!

Ever since the September 11 terrorist attacks orchestrated by members of al-Qaeda, American and other air travelers have been subjected to extensive, often intrusive, TSA screenings before boarding an aircraft. Yet it remains to be proven if having innocent passengers endure these inconveniences and indignities actually has actually helped make air travel safer. Perhaps our government should reexamine a foreign policy that helps build extremist terrorist groups, either by direct aid, or by creating “blowback” against our intervention in countries where our presence is neither needed nor welcome.



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