

H.R. 5256

“EXPANDING DHS OVERSEAS PASSENGER SECURITY SCREENING AND VETTING OPERATIONS ACT”

FACT SHEET

As introduced by

**Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson, Rep. Loretta Sanchez, Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee,
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May 16, 2016

- Over the past several years, terrorists have exploited legitimate channels of travel to the United States from countries around the globe with the intention of conducting attacks.¹ To prevent terrorist travel, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has “pushed out our borders” by expanding its presence and partnerships around the world and by vetting passengers well in advance of their arrival in the U.S.
- Currently, approximately 1,800 DHS personnel are stationed in nearly 80 countries to carry out such programs as Preclearance, the Immigration Advisory Program, and visa security vetting. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have the largest overseas presence with approximately 800 CBP personnel in 43 countries and almost 400 ICE personnel in 45 countries.
- In response to concerns over broken travel patterns and the potential exploitation of the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) by terrorists, including foreign fighters, Congress enacted the “VWP Improvement & Terrorist Travel Prevention Act” (P.L. 114-113). Under this new law, VWP partner countries must screen each traveler against INTERPOL databases to determine whether a traveler has ties to terrorism or criminal activity. Another key provision grants the Secretary of Homeland Security authority to suspend the participation of a partner country in VWP, if that country does not share intelligence and law enforcement data.
- To bolster the effectiveness of VWP reforms and prevent terrorists and other dangerous people from entering the U.S., the “Expanding DHS Overseas Passenger Security Screening and Vetting Operations Act” seeks to strengthen DHS’ overseas operations by directing the strategic expansion of CBP and ICE programs that vet and screen travelers, authorizing key DHS vetting and screening programs, and adding 2,000 CBP Officers for not only overseas operations but also to address domestic shortages, particularly at U.S. international airports.

¹ Examples include: the 19 hijackers involved in the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001; Richard Reid, also known as the “Shoe Bomber,” a British national who attempted to detonate explosives in the shoes he was wearing on a flight from Paris to Miami in December 2001; Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, also known as the “Christmas Day Bomber,” a Nigerian national who obtained a U.S. tourist visa and attempted to detonate explosives packed in his underwear on a flight from Amsterdam to Detroit in December 2009.

“EXPANDING DHS OVERSEAS PASSENGER SECURITY SCREENING AND VETTING OPERATIONS ACT”

The “Expanding DHS Overseas Passenger Security Screening and Vetting Operations Act” enhances DHS’ overseas operations aimed at vetting and screening travelers to the United States by:

Requiring a strategic, risk-based, and coordinated approach for DHS to expand overseas operations by issuing a comprehensive five-year strategy and annual implementation plans.

Increasing CBP’s capacity to screen additional passengers and facilitate travel by authorizing:

- An additional 2,000 CBP Officers and 600 Agriculture Specialists over two years to address existing domestic staffing shortages, particularly at U.S. international airports, while expanding overseas operations.
- The Immigration Cooperation Program (currently known as the Immigration Advisory Program) in which CBP Officers work with foreign authorities, air carriers, and security personnel at foreign airports to identify persons who may be inadmissible or poses a risk to the United States prior to their immediate departure, as an additional layer of security.

Expanding ICE’s visa security operations by:

- Increasing the number of Visa Security Program units to 50 additional visa-issuing posts abroad in which ICE Agents will engage with foreign and U.S. Federal Government law enforcement partners to prevent exploitation of our visa programs.
- Directing the use of the Pre-Adjudicated Threat Recognition and Intelligence Operations Team (PATRIOT) at 50 additional visa-issuing posts abroad. PATRIOT is an automated process for screening visa application information against interagency resources from ICE, CBP, the State Department, and the Intelligence Community to identify national security and public safety threats, at 50 additional visa-issuing posts abroad.

Modernizing international trusted traveler programs to strategically increase participation by low-risk travelers to enhance travel facilitation and border security.

Identifying emerging security issues in the vetting process for non-immigrant visas by requiring the Comptroller General to report on the adequacy and appropriateness of the security screening process for each U.S. non-immigrant visa category.

Authorizing \$500 million in fiscal years 2017 and 2018 for DHS’ traveler screening and visa vetting activities and CBP staffing.