

ISSUE BRIEF

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Alternative Provision of Aviation Security in Canada and Europe Offers Ideas for the U.S.

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The U.S. Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is a well-known government entity. Most Americans, however, are probably unaware that the TSA model—one government agency being both security regulator and security provider—is quite uncommon. In light of the significant funds that the U.S. spends on aviation security, along with the various problems such as failed red team tests and problems managing lines that have plagued the TSA in the past, policymakers looking to improve U.S. aviation security would be well served in exploring how other nations handle aviation security.

The Creation of the TSA

Before 9/11, aviation security was carried out by private security companies hired and paid for by airlines and airports. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) was responsible for security rules; as a civil agency focused on the technical safety of airplanes against accidents or nature, however, the FAA did not address security concerns as would an intelligence or law enforcement agency.

After 9/11, that all changed. In October 2001, Congress and President Bush created the TSA in order to protect U.S. aviation and other parts of the transportation system from malicious actors. By the end

of 2002, the Homeland Security Act was signed into law, moving the TSA into the new Department of Homeland Security.

Significant debate over the screening workforce's management marked the two months between 9/11 and the creation of the TSA. The Senate unanimously approved an entirely federal screening workforce; but much of the House of Representatives (along with President Bush) preferred a more limited federal role with airport screeners falling under federal oversight and supervision but not being federal workers. The Senate's proposal eventually won out with only a small concession pilot program—which became known as the Screening Partnership Program—that would allow private screeners under strict TSA control.¹

Security Duties and Recent TSA Activity

The TSA handles all parts of aviation security. The TSA:

- Acts as regulator, setting rules on what passengers can bring on airplanes and how screeners are supposed to look for prohibited items.
- Oversees the acquisition and deployment of the various technologies used in the screening lines, ranging from specialized bomb detection equipment to various x-ray machines looking for weapons.
- Employs more than 40,000 security officers who are tasked with the front line screening duties.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/ib4901>

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- In recent years, the TSA has struggled to carry out these duties. In 2015, the results of an inspector general (IG) “red team” test of TSA screening were leaked, revealing that the team was able to slip 67 of 70 weapons past TSA screeners.² The IG also criticized the TSA for personnel training and management, equipment maintenance, and acquisitions programs.³ Further tests and IG reports have indicated that issues with performance still persist,⁴ despite the TSA’s continued funding of approximately \$7.5 billion.

Aviation Security in Other Nations

A 2013 Reason Foundation study, which examined the aviation screening services of European nations, found that the vast majority of airports have aviation screening services that are either self-provided by the airport or contract those duties out to a third party.⁵ At these airports, the government acts as regulator by setting and oversee the security rules, but does not provide the front line screening services. Only a handful of airports employ a government centric model akin to the TSA.

Since 2013, however, even more airports have moved away from the government model. In the figure below, the increasing dominance of self-provided or contracted aviation security is on display.

Note that this movement is only in one direction: No airports have gone from self-provision or contract to central government provision.

Security and the Private Sector

Among the numerous reasons for the non-government-centric aviation security model of these other nations, cost and accountability feature prominently.

TABLE 1

Fewer Airports in Europe Relying on Government for Passenger Screening

SCREENING DONE BY ...	AIRPORTS	
	2013	2018
Contract	171	173*
Contract/Self-provide	4	12
Contract/Government	2	2
Self-provide	32	36
Self-provide/Government	0	0
Government	19	5

* Includes Gotenburg, Sweden, which is set to change to Contract in 2019.

NOTE: Totals exclude airports if status for either year is unclear.

SOURCE: Heritage Foundation research and data provided by Airports Council International Europe.

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- **Cost.** Canada and Europe spend dramatically less per passenger on aviation security and yet still meet the international standards for aviation security.⁶ Contractor or airport-hired screeners can be managed more efficiently than a large federal bureaucracy. Indeed, these costs are lower and still include a profit margin the contractor or airport.

1. David Inserra, “Time to Privatize the TSA,” Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 3120, July 19, 2017, <https://www.heritage.org/homeland-security/report/time-privatize-the-tsa>.
2. Justin Fishel, Pierre Thomas, Mike Levine, and Jack Date, “EXCLUSIVE: Undercover DHS Tests Find Security Failures at US Airports,” *ABC News*, June 1, 2015, <http://abcnews.go.com/US/exclusive-undercover-dhs-tests-find-widespread-security-failures/story?id=31434881> (accessed May 11, 2017).
3. John Roth, “Transportation Security: Are Our Airports Safe?” testimony before the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, U.S. House of Representatives, May 13, 2015, https://www.oig.dhs.gov/assets/TM/2015/OIGtm_JR_051315.pdf (accessed May 11, 2017).
4. Michael Goldstein, “TSA Misses 70% of Fake Weapons but That’s an Improvement,” *Forbes*, November 9, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelgoldstein/2017/11/09/tsa-misses-70-of-fake-weapons-but-thats-an-improvement/#5372706c2a38> (accessed August 31, 2018), and Andrew Blake “TSA Failed to Detect 95 Percent of Prohibited Items at Minneapolis Airport: Report,” *The Washington Times*, July 6, 2017, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/jul/6/tsa-failed-detect-95-percent-prohibited-items-minn/> (accessed August 31, 2018).
5. Shirley Ybarra, “Overhauling U.S. Airport Security,” Reason Foundation *Policy Brief* No. 109, July 2013, http://reason.org/files/overhauling-airport_security.pdf (accessed May 11, 2017).
6. David Gillen and William G. Morrison, “Aviation Security: Costing, Pricing, Finance and Performance,” *Journal of Air Transport Management*, Vol. 48 (September 2015), <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0969699714001537> (accessed August 30, 2018).

■ **Accountability.**⁷ The TSA sets its own rules. Where a regulated entity is its own regulator, there will always be a temptation to protect the whole of the organization. Under this model, security failures are handled in-house and the TSA cannot be easily replaced. Add to this lack of accountability the desire of the TSA union to protect its government workers, and the TSA has an immense amount of pressure to maintain the status quo. On the other hand, if a private screening force fails security regulations, they can be held accountable and replaced.

Better cost efficiency and enhanced accountability measures can only improve security. Similarly, private provision of screening services also seems to provide customer service that is better than TSA provided security.⁸

A Better Way Forward

The U.S. needed to make serious changes after 9/11 to the way it protected the aviation security. The decision to make the TSA security regulator, equipment overseer, and personnel manager was not the right approach. In fact, it is an increasingly atypical approach as other nations move toward private or self-provided screeners. These alternative methods and similar programs, like the U.S.'s small Screening Partnership Program or Canada's public-private partnership, provide security that is as good, more efficient, and less expensive than the TSA. Congress should:

■ **Refocus the TSA on security regulations and oversight.** The TSA should focus on ensuring security standards are being met and heading off threats.

■ **Replace TSA screeners with private screeners.** This can be accomplished in one of (at least) two ways.

1. *Have the SPP cover all airports.* The TSA would turn screening operations over to airports that would choose security contractors who meet TSA regulations. The TSA would oversee and test airports for compliance.
2. *Adopt a Canadian-like system.* The TSA would turn over screening operations to a new government corporation that contracts out screening service to private contractors. Contractors would bid on providing their services to a set of airports in a region, likely with around 10 regions in the U.S. The TSA would continue to set security regulations and test airports for compliance while the new corporation would establish any operating procedures or customer service standards.

Flying the Safer Skies

The U.S. needed stronger aviation security after 9/11. The TSA was an important and necessary step toward fighting terrorism in the immediate aftermath of the attacks. Almost 17 years later, numerous viable options to reform the TSA and make it more cost-effective are available. Congress should look to the alternatives embraced by other nations, or the U.S.'s own private aviation security program, as models for future reform.

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7. Robert W. Poole, Jr., "Rethinking Airport Screening Policy," testimony before the Subcommittee on Transportation Security, Committee on Homeland Security, U.S. House of Representatives, July 10, 2012, <https://homeland.house.gov/files/Testimony%20Poole.pdf> (accessed August 30, 2018).

8. Report, *TSA Ingores More Cost-Effective Screening Model*, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and Infrastructure, U.S. House of Representatives, June 3, 2011, <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&doc=143209&coll=limited> (accessed August 30, 2018).

APPENDIX TABLE 1

Airport Passenger Screening Providers in Europe (Page 1 of 4)

Country	Airports	2013	2018
Albania	Tirana	Contract	Contract
Austria	Vienna	Self-provide	Self-provide
	Graz	Contract	Contract
	Innsbruck	Contract	Contract
Austria	Klagenfurt	Contract	Contract
	Linz	Contract	Contract
	Saltzburg	Contract	Contract
	Antwerp	Contract	Self-provide and contract
	Brussels	Contract	Contract
Belgium	Charleroi	Contract	Contract
	Liege	Contract	Self-provide and contract
	Ostend/Bruges	Contract	Self-provide and contract
Bosnia	Sarajevo	Government	Government
	Mostar	Government	Government
Bulgaria	Sofia	Government	Government
	Varna	Government	Self-provide
	Burgas	—	Self-provide
	Zagreb	Contract	Contract
Croatia	Brac	Contract	Contract
	Dubrovnik	Contract	Contract
Cyprus	Larnaka	Government	Contract
	Pafos	Government	Contract
Czech Republic	Prague	Self-provide	Self-provide
Denmark	Copenhagen	Self-provide	Self-provide
Estonia	Tallinn	Contract	Contract
	Helsinki	Contract	Contract
	Kittila	Contract	Contract
	Oulu	Contract	Contract
Finland	Rovaniemi	Contract	Contract
	Tampere	Contract	Contract
	Turku	Contract	Contract
	Vassa	Contract	Contract
	Bordeaux	Contract	Contract
	Lyon	Contract	Contract
	Marseille	Contract	Contract
France	Nantes	Contract	Contract
	Nice	Contract	—
	Paris CDG	Contract	Contract
	Paris Orly	Contract	Contract
	Toulouse	Contract	Contract

APPENDIX TABLE 1

Airport Passenger Screening Providers in Europe (Page 2 of 4)

Country	Airports	2013	2018
Germany (Federal government oversight)	Stuttgart	Contract	Contract
	Berlin-Tegel	Contract	Contract
	Berlin-Schönefeld	Contract	Contract
	Bremen	Contract	Contract
	Hamburg	Contract	Contract
	Frankfurt	Self-provide/Contract	Self-provide/Contract
	Hannover	Contract	Contract
	Dusseldorf	Contract	Contract
	Cologne/Bonn,	Contract	Contract
	Saarbrücken	Contract	Contract
	Dresden	Contract	Contract
	Leipzig/Halle	Contract	Contract
Germany (Regional government oversight)	Erfurt	Contract	Contract
	Munich	Government/Contract	Government/Contract
	Nuremberg	Government/Contract	Government/Contract
	Friedrichshafen	Contract	Contract
	Karlsruhe	Contract	Contract
	Münster/Osnabrück	Self-provide	Self-provide
	Paderborn/Lippstadt	Contract	Contract
	Dortmund	Self-provide	Contract
Greece	Niederrhein	Contract	Contract
	Hahn	Contract	Contract
	Athens	Contract	Contract
	Corfu	Contract	Contract
	Rhodes	Contract	Contract
	Thessaloniki	Contract	Contract
Hungary	11 other Fraport airports	Contract	Contract
	Heraklion	—	Contract
Hungary	Budapest	Self-provide	Self-provide
Iceland	Keflavik	Self-provide	Self-provide
Ireland	Cork	Self-provide	Self-provide/Contract
	Dublin	Self-provide	Self-provide/Contract
	Knock	Self-provide	Self-provide
	Shannon	Self-provide	Self-provide/Contract
Italy	Milan	Self-provide	Self-provide
	Rome	Self-provide	Self-provide
	Venice	—	Self-provide
	Milan Linate	Self-provide	Self-provide
	Catania	—	Self-provide/Contract
	Naples	—	Self-provide
	Bologne	—	Self-provide

APPENDIX TABLE 1

Airport Passenger Screening Providers in Europe (Page 3 of 4)

Country	Airports	2013	2018
Italy (cont.)	Florence	Contract	Contract
	Olbia	Contract	Contract
	Genova	Contract	Contract
	Trapani	—	Contract
	Perugia	Self-provide	Self-provide
	Ancona	Self-provide	Self-provide
	Pescara	Contract	Contract
	Parma	—	Contract
Latvia	Riga	Self-provide	Self-provide
Lithuania	Vilnius	Self-provide	Self-provide
	Kaunas	Self-provide	Self-provide
	Palanga	Self-provide	Self-provide
	Šiauliai	Self-provide	Self-provide
Luxembourg	Luxembourg	Self-provide/Contract	Self-provide/Contract
Malta	Malta	Self-provide/Contract	Self-provide/Contract
Netherlands	Amsterdam	Contract	Contract
	Rotterdam	Contract	Contract
	Eindhoven	Contract	Contract
Norway	Bergen	Contract	Contract
	Bodo	Contract	Contract
	Oslo	Contract	Contract
	Trondheim	Contract	Contract
	42 others	Contract	Contract
Poland	Cracow	Government	Self-provide
	Poznan	Government	Self-provide
	Warsaw	Government	Self-provide/Contract
	Katowice	Government	Self-provide/Contract
	Gdańsk	Government	Self-provide
	Modlin	Government	Contract
	Rzeszów	Government	Self-provide
	Lublin	Government	Self-provide
	Szczecin	Government	Self-provide
	Łódź	Government	Self-provide
Wrocław	Government	Self-provide	
Portugal	Azores	Contract	Contract
	Faro	Contract	Contract
	Lisbon	Contract	Contract
	Madeira	Contract	Contract
	Porto	Contract	Contract
Romania	Bucharest	Government	Government
Russia	Moscow, Domodedovo	Self-provide	Self-provide
	Moscow Sherementvevo	Self-provide	Self-provide
	St. Petersburg	Self-provide	Self-provide
Serbia	Belgrade	Self-provide	Self-provide
Slovenia	Ljubljana	Contract	—

APPENDIX TABLE 1

Airport Passenger Screening Providers in Europe (Page 4 of 4)

Country	Airports	2013	2018
Spain	46 AENA airports, including Barcelona, Madrid, Malaga, Seville, and Valencia	Contract	Contract
Sweden	Stockholm Arlanda	Contract	Contract
	Bromma	Contract	Contract
	Malmö	Contract	Contract
	Gothenburg	Self-provide	Self-provide*
Switzerland	Zurich	Government	Government
	Geneva	Self-provide/Contract	Self-provide/Contract
Turkey	Istanbul Ataturk	—	Self-provide/Contract
United Kingdom	Edinburgh	Self-provide	Self-provide
	Glasgow	Self-provide	Self-provide
	Manchester	Self-provide	Self-provide
	London Heathrow	Self-provide	Self-provide
	London Stansted	Self-provide	Self-provide
	London Gatwick	Self-provide	Self-provide
	Doncaster	Contract	Contract
	Durham	Contract	Contract
	Liverpool	Contract	Contract
	London City	Contract	—
Bristol	—	Contract	

* Changing to Contract in 2019.

SOURCE: Heritage Foundation research and data provided by Airports Council International Europe.