

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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<http://oversight.house.gov>

June 1, 2016

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) conducts covert “Red Team” tests on security systems at airport passenger and checked baggage screening checkpoints, airport perimeters, and access control areas. These tests are designed to approximate, as closely as possible, techniques that terrorists or other individuals who may pose a threat to aviation security could use to introduce threat objects, such as improvised explosive devices, into airport sterile areas or onto aircraft.

The Red Team tests help TSA determine whether existing security systems are effective, and identify vulnerabilities that could allow a dangerous object to pass through a security checkpoint undetected. Red Team test results alone do not provide a complete picture of system effectiveness. They do, however, serve as a performance indicator that can inform program and resource decisions.

In August 2008, the Government Accountability Office reported that TSA designed and implemented risk-based national and local covert testing programs to achieve its goals of identifying vulnerabilities in and measuring the performance of the aviation security system. Although tests conducted through June 2007 had identified vulnerabilities in the commercial aviation system at airports of all sizes, GAO reported that TSA could more fully use the results to mitigate the vulnerabilities that were identified and to develop system-wide improvements.¹

We are also deeply concerned by the recent findings from the DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG), which conducted its own covert testing at U.S commercial airports. The alarming findings from the OIG’s covert tests caused the Secretary of Homeland Security to revise the standard operating procedures for screening at the nation’s airports, among other things.

¹ U.S. Gov’t Accountability Office, *Aviation Security: Vulnerabilities Exposed through Covert Testing of TSA’s Passenger Screening Process* (GAO-08-48T), November 15, 2007.

In light of the ever-evolving threats to airport security, and the introduction of new security technologies to neutralize those threats, the Committee is interested in understanding whether TSA's covert testing program has implemented GAO's recommendations, has modified its reviews in light of evolving threats, and is efficient at performing its oversight responsibilities.

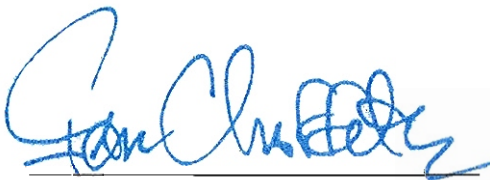
Accordingly, the Committee requests that GAO assess TSA's covert testing program to determine whether it is being fully utilized and integrated into relevant decision-making processes. Specifically, we request that GAO address the following questions:

1. How does TSA design and execute covert tests, including, but not limited to, how TSA determines which processes and programs to test, how to construct the tests, and the manner and frequency with which the tests are conducted?
2. What are the results of TSA's covert tests since June 2007?
3. How has TSA analyzed the covert testing results, and to what extent are the results used to make program and resource decisions?
4. What changes have been made in TSA's security protocols, policies, and practices to respond to the results of covert tests?

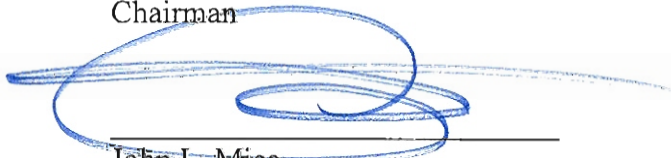
Additionally, we request that GAO employ the appropriate investigative techniques to independently identify vulnerabilities in the current aviation security systems and processes.

Please contact Michael Ding of the Committee's majority staff at (202) 225-5074 or Lucinda Lessley with Ranking Member Cummings at (202) 225-5051 with any question about this request. Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,



Jason Chaffetz
Chairman



John L. Mica
Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation
and Public Assets



Elijah E. Cummings
Ranking Member



Tammy Duckworth
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation
and Public Assets