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TSA Let 25 Illegal Aliens Attend Flight School Owned by Illegal Alien

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By [Edwin Mora](#)

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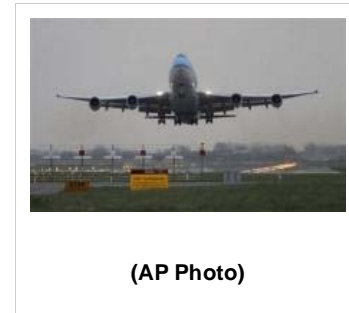


(CNSNews.com) -- The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) approved flight training for 25 illegal aliens at a Boston-area flight school that was owned by yet another illegal alien, according to the Government Accountability Office.

The illegal-alien flight-school attendees included eight who had entered the country illegally and 17 who had overstayed their allowed period of admission into the United States, according to an audit by the GAO.

Three of the illegal aliens were actually able to get pilot's licenses.

Discovery of the trouble at the flight school began when local police--not federal authorities--pulled over the owner of the school on a traffic violation and were able to determine that he was an illegal alien.



Rep. Mike Rogers (R.-Ala.), chairman of the House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Transportation Security, said he found the GAO's findings "amazing."

"We have cancer patients, Iraq War veterans and Nobel Prize winners all forced to undergo rigorous security checks before getting on an airplane," said Rogers, "and at the same time, ten years after 9/11, there are foreign nationals in the United States trained to fly just like Mohammed Atta and the other 9/11 hijackers did, and not all of them are necessarily getting a security background check."

Stephen Lord, who is the GAO's director of Homeland Security and Justice Issues, testified about the matter Wednesday in Rogers' subcommittee. Rogers asked him: "Isn't it true that, based on your report, the Transportation Security Administration cannot assure the American people that foreign terrorists are not in this country learning how to fly airplanes, yes or no?"

Lord responded: "At this time, no."

Although the illegal alien who owned the Massachusetts flight school had not undergone a required TSA security threat assessment and had not been approved for flight training by the agency, he nonetheless held two Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) pilot licenses, also known as FAA certificates.

The GAO report, released today, is entitled [General Aviation Security: TSA's Process for Ensuring Foreign Flight Students Do Not Pose a Security Risk Has Weaknesses](#).

In response to the September 11, 2001 attacks on the U.S. homeland perpetrated by terrorists who learned how to pilot aircraft at flight schools in Florida, Arizona, and Minnesota, the TSA, a component of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), developed the "Alien Flight Student Program (AFSP) to help determine whether foreign students enrolling at flight schools pose a security threat," said the GAO's Stephen Lord in written testimony prepared for Wednesday's hearing in the House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Transportation Security.

According to the *911 Commission Report*, four of the Sept. 11 hijackers who entered the United States with legal visas had overstayed their authorized period of admission.

Under the Alien Flight Student Program, foreign nationals are supposed to be subjected to a TSA security threat assessment prior to receiving flight training to determine whether they pose a security threat to the United States.

"According to TSA regulations, an individual poses a security threat when the individual is suspected of posing, or is known to pose, a threat to transportation or national security, a threat of air piracy or terrorism, a threat to airline or passenger security, or a threat to civil aviation security," Lord said in his written testimony.

"According to TSA officials, when a foreign national applies to AFSP to obtain flight training, TSA uses information submitted by the foreign national--such as name, date of birth, and passport information--to conduct a criminal history records check, a review of the Terrorist Screening Database, and a review of the Department of Homeland Security's TECS [anti-terrorism] system," Lord testified.

However, a "weakness" in TSA's Alien Flight Student Program, noted by GAO, is that it does not check for immigration status.

"AFSP is not designed to determine whether a foreign flight student entered the country legally; thus, a foreign national can be approved for training through AFSP after entering the country illegally," **stated the GAO in its report**. "In March 2010, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) investigated a Boston-area flight school after local police stopped the flight school owner for a traffic violation and discovered that he was in the country illegally. In response to this incident, ICE launched a broader investigation of the students enrolled at the flight school."



(AP Photo)

"ICE found that 25 of the foreign nationals at this flight school had applied to AFSP and had been approved by TSA to begin flight training after their security threat assessment had been completed; however," reads the GAO report, "the ICE investigation and our subsequent inquiries revealed the following issues, among other things:

--"Eight of the 25 foreign nationals who received approval by TSA to begin flight training were in 'entry without inspection' status, meaning they had entered the country illegally. Three of these had obtained FAA airman certificates [pilot's license]: 2 held FAA private pilot certificates and 1 held an FAA commercial pilot certificate.

--"Seventeen of the 25 foreign nationals who received approval by the TSA to begin flight training were in 'overstay' status, meaning they had overstayed their authorized period of admission into the United

States.

--"In addition, the flight school owner held two FAA airman certificates. Specifically, he was a certified Airline Transport Pilot (cargo pilot) and a Certified Flight Instructor. However, he had never received a TSA security threat assessment or been approved by TSA to obtain flight training. He had registered with TSA as a flight training provider under AFSP."

A GAO official told CNSNews.com that, based on their names, none of the 25 illegal aliens who attended the flight school appeared to be from Muslim countries. Instead, they had Latin American names.

The GAO found that, "From January 2006 through September 2011, 25,599 foreign nationals had applied for FAA airman certificates, indicating they had completed flight training." That information is placed on the FAA airmen registry.

The GAO provided information from the FAA's airmen registry to TSA "so that the agency could conduct a matching process to determine whether the foreign nationals in the FAA airmen registry were in TSA's AFSP database and the extent to which they had been successfully vetted through the AFSP database."

The GAO found that not everyone in the FAA registry had been vetted properly.

"TSA's analysis indicated that some of the 25,599 foreign nationals in the FAA airmen registry were not in the TSA AFSP database, indicating that these individuals had not applied to the AFSP or been vetted by TSA before taking flight training and receiving an FAA airman certificate," stated the GAO.

The GAO continued, "TSA's analysis indicated that an additional number of the 25,599 foreign nationals in the FAA airmen registry were also in the TSA AFSP database but had not been successfully vetted, meaning that they had received an FAA airman certificate but had not been successfully vetted or received permission from TSA to begin flight training."

The GAO did not provide the full number of individuals who were not properly vetted.

The GAO's Stephen Lord, in his prepared remarks, told lawmakers that the TSA does not screen new and existing FAA pilot license holders against the Terrorist Screening Database until after the foreign national has completed flight training.

"Thus, foreign nationals obtaining flight training with the intent to do harm, such as three of the pilots and leaders of the September 11 terrorist attacks, could have already obtained the training needed to operate an aircraft before they received any type of vetting," warned the GAO.

The TSA and ICE are working on a pilot program for vetting the names of foreign nationals against immigration databases.

However, the GAO noted that the two agencies "have not specified desired outcomes and time frames, or assigned individuals with responsibility for fully instituting the program."

The GAO further stated, "We recommended that TSA and ICE develop a plan, with time frames, and assign individuals with responsibility and accountability for assessing the results of their pilot program to check TSA AFSP data against information DHS has on applicants' admissibility status to help detect and identify violations, such as overstays and entries without inspection, by foreign flight students, and institute that pilot program if it is found to be effective."

"DHS concurred with this recommendation and stated that TSA will prepare a plan by December 2012 to assess the results of the pilot program with ICE to determine the lawful status of the active AFSP population," said the GAO.

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