

Dubai's Emirates, Turkish Airlines off US laptop ban list

July 2 2017, by Jon Gambrell



In this March 22, 2017 file photo, an Emirates plane taxis to a gate at Dubai International Airport in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Dubai-based Emirates airlines says the U.S. has exempted it from a ban on laptops in airplane cabins. (AP Photo/Adam Schreck, File)

Emirates and Turkish Airways said on Wednesday they have also been exempted from a U.S. ban on laptops in airplane cabins, joining Etihad in satisfying American security concerns that had cut into the long-haul

carriers' business.

It remains unclear how the airlines addressed fears that the Islamic State or other militant groups might smuggle explosives in electronic devices. But in Turkey, authorities now use CT scanners to take cross-section images of passengers' electronics just before they board airplanes heading to the U.S.

Both airlines alerted the Department of Homeland Security, which oversees airplane safety in the United States, that "they are ready to comply with the enhanced security measures," said David Lapan, a Homeland Security spokesman in Washington. He declined to discuss specifics.

"Protecting the American people and raising the global baseline on aviation security remains the top priority," Lapan said. "We will continue to closely observe operations in these airports to ensure these enhanced measures are implemented effectively and to the required levels."

Emirates' hub at Dubai International Airport has grown into the world's busiest for international traffic, in large part thanks to Emirates' expansion.

On Wednesday, Emirates said in a statement that it had worked to "implement heightened security measures and protocols" to satisfy American requirements. It did not elaborate, following a similar precedent set by Abu Dhabi-based Etihad, which American officials cleared on Sunday.

"We would like to express our gratitude to the U.S. and local authorities for their support and thank our customers for their understanding and patience during the last few months when the ban was in place," Emirates said.



In this Jan. 10, 2017 file photo, Turkish Airlines aircrafts are stationed at Ataturk International Airport covered in snow, in Istanbul, Tuesday. Istanbul-based Turkish Airlines tweeted early Wednesday that it had been exempted from a ban on laptops in airplane cabins. (Faik Kaptan/Depo Photos via AP, File)

In Istanbul, Turkish Airlines tweeted that passengers aboard its U.S.-bound flights should "fasten your seatbelts and enjoy your own electronic devices." A statement from the airline said it had taken over 81,000 electronic devices away from passengers to store them in specially protected baggage during the 102 days the ban was in place.

The U.S. laptop ban, first announced in March as a security measure, now applies to nonstop U.S.-bound flights from seven international airports in Amman, Jordan; Kuwait City; Cairo; Jeddah and Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; Casablanca, Morocco; and Doha, Qatar.

In May, U.S. President Donald Trump shared highly classified intelligence with senior Russian officials visiting the White House about the Islamic State group wanting to use laptops to target aircraft.

Qatar Airways, the last of the three major Gulf long-haul carriers on the list, declined to answer questions Wednesday about the ban. That airline already has been blocked from much of its neighbors' airspace over an ongoing dispute with four Arab nations.

Speaking in London, Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani said that American TSA officials were "already in Doha."

"I think they arrived yesterday," Sheikh Mohammed told a crowd at Chatham House. "This is an ongoing process and I think irrelevant to the entire" political crisis.

Saudi Arabian Airlines has said it hopes to be off the ban list "on or before July 19."



Passengers check into a flight at Abu Dhabi International Airport in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, Tuesday, July 4, 2017. Travelers bound for the U.S. now enjoy something many others flying out of the Middle East can't—walking onto an airplane with their laptop. But what has changed in Abu Dhabi remains unclear as the laptop ban still affects nine other regional airports, including the world's busiest for international travel in nearby Dubai. (AP Photo/Jon Gambrell)

Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Veysi Kaynak welcomed the lifting of the ban at Istanbul's airport, saying the restrictions had targeted Muslim nations and amounted to a discrimination against them as potential "criminals."

"The countries that were subjected to the ban were generally Muslim countries," Kaynak told The Associated Press. "It is a grave error to regard the people of a certain faith collectively as people with the potential to commit crimes."

Kaynak said that along with the CT scanners, the Istanbul airport is now restricting U.S.-bound flights to two departure gates, apparently for better security.

There is a precedent for concern over laptops being used as bombs. Somalia's al-Qaida-linked al-Shabab said it planted a bomb inside a laptop-like device that exploded on a plane leaving Mogadishu in February 2016, killing only the bomber.

However, the security concerns also come amid a wider dispute between Gulf airlines and American carriers, which accuse the Middle East airlines of flooding the market with flights while receiving billions of dollars of unfair government subsidies. The Gulf carriers all vigorously deny that.

The laptop ban, coupled with the Trump administration's travel ban on six predominantly Muslim countries, has hurt Middle Eastern airlines. Emirates, the region's biggest, said it slashed 20 percent of its flights to America in the wake of the restrictions. The airline said Wednesday it now flies 103 flights a week to the U.S.

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