

## The New Currency of Travel and Trade

by Stephen R. Heifetz and Marc E. Frey

*"If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah"*  
Nehemiah 2:7 (King James translation of the Hebrew Bible)

On Christmas Day, a radicalized Nigerian attempted to bomb a plane en route from Amsterdam to Detroit. That event, and the resulting echoes of September 11, focused public attention on the U.S. government's challenges of identifying "bad guys" in transit. It is a challenge rightly compared to finding a few needles among millions of haystacks.

The government's monumental task necessitates shrinking the number and size of the haystacks. That is the purpose of 'trusted traveler and trade programs,' which the Department of Homeland Security has pioneered to identify and facilitate the transportation of low risk people and cargo. The idea behind these programs—which enable authorities to process quickly low risk people and cargo and to focus on higher risks—is not new. Rather, they are the modern equivalent of Nehemiah's requested letters to governors beyond the rivers.

Nehemiah was able to obtain letters from the king to smooth his travel because Nehemiah had been personally screened by the king. Today's trusted traveler programs rely on technologically sophisticated screening tools and transit documents. Current tools include difficult-to-forge documents incorporating the latest in biometric technology. And modern screening systems can combine travel history or cargo manifest information, for example, with law enforcement records and clandestinely gathered intelligence.

One resultant development is the decline of the cumbersome visa process as an indispensable travel gateway, in favor of more secure and efficient gateways. U.S.-bound travelers on the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) generally present less risk, paradoxically, than those who have obtained visas. The program consists of 36 member countries whose citizens are screened electronically and permitted to travel to the U.S. without visas. Compared to travelers from countries that are not VWP countries, the U.S. government screens travelers arriving under the program more frequently, using more screening information, and with greater assurance in the integrity of their travel documents and the security standards in the travelers' home countries.

The U.S. government is able to insist on heightened foreign security standards as a condition of program entry. From the perspective of a foreign government, entry into the VWP eliminates the cumbersome visa process for their U.S.-bound travelers and enables the government to reap the symbolic rewards of 'club membership.' So, in exchange for efficiency (eliminating the cumbersome visa process) and status (club membership), both the U.S. government and its foreign partner get heightened security.

The U.S. government should seek ways to make similar trades, not only by adding members to the VWP (Greece was added in March 2010; nine countries have been added in the

last two years), but also by expanding other trusted traveler and trade programs that have been enabled by new screening technologies and regulated transit documents. Additional programs include:

- **Global Entry.** After vetting that includes an interview with a U.S. government official, successful Global Entry applicants from the United States and the Netherlands can move through expedited immigration lines at participating airports - the Netherlands is the first partner country for the Global Entry program, but this program likely will expand to other countries;
- **Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism.** Importers and other businesses in the supply chain that adhere to U.S.-government security standards are subject to fewer cargo inspections in U.S. ports;
- **Certified Cargo Screening Program.** Cargo on passenger planes must be screened, which can lead to delays at airports if cargo is not screened beforehand; the innovative Certified Cargo Screening Program enables businesses to become trusted screeners so that cargo can be screened before it arrives at airports.

These programs should be expanded. With respect to the Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism, for example, the U.S. government should encourage more foreign governments to develop supply chain security programs that conform to the U.S. program. To encourage this development, the U.S. government can offer to members of conforming foreign programs the same benefits of membership in the U.S. program, namely, fewer cargo inspections and faster transit. Ultimately, the U.S. government would retain discretion to determine which foreign programs are truly conforming, and this recognition should follow only upon extensive auditing of the foreign programs.

These arrangements are beginning, and their growth is critical. Like the Visa Waiver Program, granting efficiency benefits to countries whose supply chain security standards conform to our own greatly magnifies the effects of U.S. security standards and increases global security and efficiency.

As the U.S. government expands efforts to distinguish trusted travelers, like Nehemiah, from potential Christmas bombers - the dangerous needles in the haystacks - further reductions in the number and size of the haystacks is essential. Trusted traveler and trade programs enable faster and more accurate distinctions of low risk and high risk travelers and cargo, with more attendant resources for higher risks. Those interested in security, as well as those interested in travel and trade, should encourage expansions of trusted traveler and trade programs.

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