

ALPA Issue Briefing/Q&A

The Case Against a CBP Preclearance Facility at Abu Dhabi International Airport



Assertion

A U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) preclearance facility at Abu Dhabi International Airport would place U.S.-based airlines at a competitive disadvantage and would set a dangerous precedent for determining future CBP preclearance sites. In creating a facility at this location, the U.S. government would be making security decisions based on foreign finances, and supporting a foreign economic policy that clearly endeavors to grow its state-owned carrier at the expense of U.S. airlines and their employees.

Q&As

Question: What is a CBP preclearance facility?

Answer: The CBP is an agency of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). A CBP preclearance facility allows passengers in a foreign country to clear U.S. customs at their point of departure. Passengers are then able to avoid long waits at customs arrival check points at U.S. airports.

Question: Are there existing CBP preclearance facilities? If so, how many are there?

Answer: There are currently 15 CBP preclearance sites strategically located at airports in Canada, Ireland, and parts of the Caribbean, where U.S. airlines perform a considerable amount of the flying.

Question: If CBP preclearance facilities currently exist, what would be different about creating one in Abu Dhabi?

Answer: Etihad Airlines, owned and operated by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), is the only airline that provides service between Abu Dhabi and the United States. No U.S. airline currently flies there. Etihad Airlines operates nonstop service to Washington, New York, and Chicago, and has announced expansion to other U.S. markets. Providing CBP preclearance facilities would give it a competitive advantage over other airlines—including U.S. carriers—that fly routes to the United States from Asia and the Middle East.

Question: Are there other differences?

Answer: Yes. The 15 existing U.S. CBP preclearance facilities are partially funded by U.S. airlines and their passengers entering the United States, from the \$1.5 billion in annual user fees they pay.

For an Abu Dhabi facility, DHS would enter into a reimbursable agreement with the UAE government for roughly 80 percent of the costs of clearing passengers into the United States. This pay-to-play construct could create an incentive to allow CBP resources and national security interests to be dictated by economics rather than actual security needs.

Question: Is the competitive advantage that significant?

Answer: Yes. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), for which Abu Dhabi is capital, makes no secret about its intent to grow the emirate, or city-state, into a global hub for commerce and tourism. Creating a U.S. CBP preclearance facility there would give Etihad a significant convenience to offer its passengers. Etihad already benefits from a tax-free business environment, a supportive

national airline policy, and an enormous state infrastructure investment—benefits that U.S.-based airlines do not share.

Question: Why shouldn't DHS and CBP be free to create preclearance facilities where they see fit?

Answer: As U.S. government agencies, both DHS and CBP should provide products and services that first benefit U.S. taxpayers, U.S. airlines and their employees, and the U.S. economy.

An Abu Dhabi CBP preclearance facility would benefit a foreign government and its state-owned airline, and could contribute to the loss of U.S. airline flying and jobs.

Question: How does ALPA's stance against the Abu Dhabi CBP preclearance facility fit into the Association's strategic plan?

Answer: Stopping a CPB preclearance facility at the Abu Dhabi International Airport and other locations where U.S. based airlines do not fly is supported by ALPA's strategic initiative, "Leveling the Playing Field for U.S. Airlines and Their Employees."

Question: Does ALPA stand alone in its position on the Abu Dhabi CBP preclearance facility?

Answer: No. In addition to ALPA, other organizations speaking out against a CBP preclearance facility in Abu Dhabi include Airlines for America, Airports Council International–North America, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the AFL-CIO's Transportation Trades Department, the Consumer Travel Alliance, the Global Business Travel Association, and the Regional Airline Association.