

The Washington Post

Airlines are ordered to check no-fly lists much faster

By Jerry Markon and Spencer S. Hsu

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The U.S. government on Wednesday began requiring airlines to check no-fly lists much more quickly as a way to screen out terrorism suspects, officials said, after the man accused of trying to detonate a car bomb in Times Square was able to board an international flight even though his name was listed.

Until now, airlines have had 24 hours to check the government's no-fly list after they were notified that a name was added through a special expedited process that indicates a potentially high level of risk. As of Wednesday, they must check within two hours.

Faisal Shahzad, the Times Square suspect, was placed on the expedited no-fly list at 12:30 p.m. Monday. But he was able to buy a one-way ticket to Pakistan shortly after 7:30 p.m., a little more than four hours before the flight was scheduled to leave. After he boarded the Emirates airline flight at John F. Kennedy International airport in New York, federal officials were alerted and escorted him off the plane.

"In his case, the airline seemingly didn't check the name, and the suspect was allowed to purchase a ticket and obtain a boarding pass," a senior administration official said Wednesday in an e-mail. "Under the new measure, the airline would be required to re-

check the list within two hours of being notified of a special circumstance expedited No Fly name."

Emirates airline has said it did check the list hours before the flight, but, because Shahzad had not yet bought his ticket, his name was not on the manifest. The government has challenged parts of the airline's account.

In a statement Wednesday, Emirates said that it "fully cooperated with and responded immediately to all local and federal authorities on all matters" related to the flight. It also said it is fully compliant with all U.S. passenger check-in procedures and works closely with the U.S. government "to update security watch lists on a regular and timely basis."

The policy change announced Wednesday underscores the challenge U.S. security

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officials face as they rely on individual airlines to scan lists of potentially high-risk passengers and help to screen them out. Control of the screening system is gradually being shifted from the airlines to the government.

A group of Democratic senators called on President Obama to issue an executive order to close what they said is a loophole that allows suspects such as Shahzad to escape detection by paying cash for airline tickets.

Sens. Benjamin L. Cardin (Md.), Charles E. Schumer (N.Y.) and Mark Udall (Colo.) said in a statement Wednesday that under their proposal, if a passenger tried to buy a plane ticket with cash, the airline would have to alert the Transportation Security Administration. An on-site TSA agent would then examine the person's ID for forgery and check his or her name against the latest no-fly list.

The senators said the new policy would bolster airline security until the end of the year, when airlines' responsibility for checking passenger manifests against the no-fly list is scheduled to shift entirely to the TSA.

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