RADAR

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Middle East aviation, travellers scramble to cope after US, UK impose device bans

US, UK 'evaluated intelligence' leads to bans on large devices onboard flights from MENA

REGULATIONS

The US and UK ban last month on devices in cabins on flights from MENA has left the regional aviation industry scrambling to cope with the new rules.

In a statement released to *Aviation Business,* the US government cited "evaluated intelligence" and warned that extremists plan to target passenger jets with bombs hidden in electronic devices. "Electronic devices larger than a cell phone/smart phone" have been bammed from being carried onboard cabins on flights from 10 airports in eight countries.

Less than a day after the announcement, the UK imposed similar restrictions on flights flying directly to Britain from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Turkey, but excluded airports in the UAE and Qatar named in the US list.

The UK rule change affects six British airlines, including British Airways and EasyJet, and eight foreign carriers, including Turkish Airlines. The US ban affects nine airlines in eight countries including Turkey, Morocco, Jordan, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. However, the US rule affects no US carriers as they don't fly directly to the Middle East.

The chairman of the UAE's aviation authority has expressed his "surprise" after local airports were included in the US ban.

"The UAE is the number one ranked country worldwide by the International Civil Aviation Organisation regarding compliance with international security and safety standards," said Sultan bin Saeed Al Mansouri, reported *Arabian Business.*

Airlines have been proactive in addressing the situation, announcing changes to flight rules online and through social media. Both Turkish and Emirates have announced new services that allow travellers to use devices until just before boarding. Emirates has also re-purposed an October

▲ Ruling is expected to impact traffic to the US; sales to US on Emirates fell 35% after travel ban in January

2016 ad with Jennifer Aniston to highlight its inflight entertainment systems in an ad that begins by asking, "Who needs laptops and tablets anyway?"

However, with up to two-thirds of airline revenue on commercial flights coming from passengers in premium cabins who choose to stay connected on long haul flights, some have suggested growing competition from Middle East carriers on long haul flights into Europe and the US might have played a part in the rulings. Emirates CEO Tim Clark told *Bloomberg* he "hopes that isn't the case," and has previously said that the US travel ban in January led to a 35 percent decrease in ticket sales to the United States

"This will cause the three major Middle East airlines to lose a noticeable amount of business to other carriers," says Henry Harteveldt, president and analyst, Atmosphere Research Group.

"It will have a disproportionate impact on Emirates, since it is the largest airline between the US and Gulf, and is responsible for much of the capacity from there to India, Asia, and Africa. Emirates' IFE ad may be clever, but it won't be effective. It's an issue of travellers not wanting, or being able, to be separated from their expensive electronics and equipment, particularly cor-

porate travellers," he says.

Global Business Travel Association executive director and COO Michael McCormick, says the ruling adversely affects business travellers, 49 percent of whom prefer to get work done while flying. Not allowing them to bring their devices on the plane "takes away time when they can be getting business done," he says. Many business travellers also prefer to keep their devices close for security purposes because they may contain sensitive company information," he adds.

Passengers will also not be so happy, "as there will clearly be concerns about the security and physical integrity of their very expensive items," says Ian Todd, vice president, professional services and airports, at security firm Restrata.

"For airports, in theory this should make the cabin baggage screening task easier. However, the biggest challenge will be people who have forgotten to put their laptops in their checked baggage. Passengers are happy to surrender their bottle of water, but it is doubtful they will be prepared to do so with their laptop or tablet and then to return to the check-in desk to check the item. I foresee some very unhappy passengers," he says.

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RADAR

US pre-clearance sees Etihad, Abu Dhabi "take advantage" of Trump travel ban

"We're seeing an increase in bookings," says CEO James Hogan

AIRLINES

A US border post in Abu Dhabi has handed local carrier Etihad Airways an advantage over its Gulf rivals following President Donald Trump's moves to curb immigration from a clutch of mainly Muslim countries, according to a Bloomberg report on *Arabian Business.*

The so-called pre-clearance facility means that travellers from the affected nations who think they qualify for entry can have their paperwork processed before leaving the Middle East, rather than risk being turned away on arrival in the US, Etihad Chief Executive Officer James Hogan, said last month.

"In these times of uncertainty people are

▲ The US Customs and Border Protection facility at AUH Terminal 3 opened in 2014

moving over to Abu Dhabi to take advantage of that clearance," Hogan said at a briefing in Serbia. "If you're going into secondary search that's better happening in Abu Dhabi than maybe on arrival in New York. So we're seeing an increase in bookings." The US Customs and Border Protection facility at Abu Dhabi International Terminal 3, which opened in 2014, allows passengers to complete immigration and customs inspections before they depart. It's the only such outpost in the Middle East and one of a handful outside North America, though the federal government has said it could seek to add more as part of a push to combat terror threats before would-be perpetrators even board a plane.

Etihad currently serves New York, Washington, Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles and San Francisco in the US, and says it doesn't plan to add further destinations.