

Airline passenger data sold to US DHS

- A Monitor Desk Report

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Dhaka: A data broker owned by some of the largest US airlines has been supplying the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) with access to sensitive passenger flight information.

The Airlines Reporting Corporation (ARC), which aggregates data from airline bookings made through U.S. travel agencies, has provided records containing travelers' names, full itineraries, and financial transaction details.

ARC makes this data available to Customs and Border Protection (CBP), along with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), both of which were previously known as the US Customs Service until 2003, and both of which are offices under DHS.

ARC is owned and operated by eight major US airlines and is unique in being the only financial intermediary between the airline industry and

US travel agencies, according to the data broker's contract with ICE. ARC also provides payment settlement services for travel agencies and airlines, which has created a huge database of travel information that the data broker then makes available under its Travel Intelligence Program (TIP).

ARC's most recently revealed contract, uncovered by tech news outlet by 404 Media, is with US Customs and Border Protection. A statement of work with that agency revealed that the TIP pilot program "generated meaningful results to current [redacted] cases and will continue to do so once fully accessible to [redacted] analysts across [redacted] Offices."

The CBP contract mandates silence from DHS on where it got the data. The statement of work, which began in June 2024 and could optionally run until June 2029, states that the CBP will "not publicly identify vendor, or its employees, individually or collectively, as the source of the Reports unless the Customer is compelled to do so by a valid court order or subpoena and gives ARC immediate notice of same."

ARC's contract with ICE, meanwhile, provides a view into the data obligations from travel agencies. As the contract stated:

"Daily, travel agencies must submit ticket sales and funds for over 240 airlines worldwide to ARC. This process enables ARC's TIP, an essential intelligence tool integrated into HSI INTEL's investigative mission."

HSI INTEL stands for the Homeland Security Investigations Office of Intelligence. It investigates criminal networks, and also any "individual or organization that threatens national security or seeks to exploit the customs and immigration laws of the United States," per the DHS website.

Those with access to the TIP database can search across 39 months of flight booking data. Flight itineraries and passenger name records, along with travel dates, flight dates, and even credit card numbers are available from the database.

Other agencies that have purchased access to the database include The Secret Service, the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the US Marshals Service, according to 404 Media.

Delta, Southwest, United, Lufthansa, Air France, American Airlines, Air Canada, Alaska Airlines, and JetBlue all have seats on the ARC board. The company also partners with hundreds of airlines and travel agencies around the world.

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