

June 23, 2022

Mr. Billy Nolen
Acting Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20591

Dear Acting Administrator Nolen:

I write to convey my deep concern about the airworthiness of aircraft operated by Russian airlines and the potential threat that they pose to travelers at home and abroad. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) was correct to downgrade its air safety rating for the Russia Federation in April, but Russian-administered aircraft that remain active in international space may present a pressing danger to passengers and crew. Foreign sanctions and U.S. export controls prevent Russian airlines from providing proper maintenance for their planes, which continue to operate without necessary upkeep. As such, I request that the FAA conduct and publish a more comprehensive and direct safety review of Russian airlines, especially ones that remain operational in international airspace, to make travelers fully aware of the risks they present.

Multilateral sanctions in response to Russia's illegal and unprovoked war in Ukraine have proven successful at depriving Vladimir Putin's criminal regime of the resources it needs to maintain several integral technical systems. Russia's airlines are no exception. At present, they face airspace bans over the bulk of Europe and North America and prohibitions on their ability to purchase new aircraft or parts, as well as procure technical assistance from Western entities. This presents extraordinary challenges to Russia's air-fleet and companies such as Aeroflot, which are heavily reliant on American and European companies like Boeing and Airbus for planes.¹

In fact, Russia's own aircraft manufacturers, like Sukhoi, tend to require Western parts, such as engines, auxiliary power units, or hydraulic systems, which are suddenly and rightfully inaccessible to them. As a response, several Russian airlines have seized billions of dollars² worth of leased foreign jets and components and then are forced to jerry-rig the stolen aircraft to keep them in operation. Moreover, many Russian airlines have attempted to evade stringent U.S. export controls, continuing to operate flights to Beijing, Delhi, Dubai, and elsewhere even after being blacklisted.³

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/02/airbus-and-boeing-to-halt-supply-of-aircraft-parts-to-russian-airlines>

² <https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-scrambles-to-save-aviation-as-sanctions-begin-to-bite/>

³ <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/us-cracks-down-russian-airlines-after-flights-violated-export-controls-2022-04-07/>

So long as Russian airlines maintain such operations, they pose a potential threat to international travelers, as well as to Russians flying domestically. As such, I ask that the FAA initiate a prompt review of these companies that outlines the dangers of using them to fly and makes Americans fully aware of the risks of Russian-administered aircraft that continue to operate in international airspace. While the FAA is unable to conduct direct oversight on Russian-administered planes, further guidance from the agency about the nature of the possible risks incurred by traveling aboard aircraft lacking up-to-date parts is much needed. As the United States continues to deprive Moscow's war machine of resources, agencies like the FAA can play a critical role in protecting travelers from the life-threatening consequences of Putin's corruption and desperation.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator