

United States Senate

COMMITTEES:
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
FINANCE
JUDICIARY
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

June 18, 2024

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary
United States Department of Homeland
Security
Washington, D.C., 20530

The Honorable Christopher Wray
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington, D.C., 20520

Dear Secretary Mayorkas and Director Wray:

I write to express my deep concern about the threats to our national security posed by President Biden's open border policies. These threats have never been more evident: recent reports indicate that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) arrested eight Tajikistani nationals with alleged ties to terrorism.¹ These individuals crossed our southern border illegally and were released into the United States, but—even more troubling—these suspected terrorists allegedly passed through screening by Customs and Border Protection with clean criminal background checks.² Despite being “fully vetted” by border officials, it has been revealed that these individuals have ties to ISIS.³ Given these disturbing revelations, Americans are rightly concerned about threats to our homeland.

At numerous hearings, press conferences, and even while visiting the southern border, I have repeatedly urged this administration to take these national security threats seriously. Unfortunately, these pleas have fallen on deaf ears. Indeed, the arrests of these individuals are not surprising given the increase in terrorist apprehensions under this administration. Specifically, since President Biden took office, CBP has encountered 362 migrants on the terrorist watchlist, compared to *just 11* under the Trump administration.⁴ Equally as concerning, we will never know how many of the nearly 1.6 million known “gotaways” who evaded CBP detection during the first two years of the Biden administration were affiliated with terrorist groups. And, as Director Wray

¹ Stepheny Price & Bill Melugin, *Authorities Nab 8 Suspected Terrorists with Ties to Isis in Multi-City Sting Operation*, FOX NEWS (June 12, 2024), <https://www.foxnews.com/us/authorities-nab-8-suspected-terrorists-ties-isis-multi-city-sting-operation>

² Julia Ainsley, Tom Winter, Andrew Blankstein, & Antonio Planas, *8 Suspected Terrorists with Possible ISIS ties arrested in New York, L.A. and Philadelphia, Sources Say*, NBC NEWS, (June 11, 2024), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/8-suspected-terrorists-possible-isis-ties-arrested-new-york-l-philadel-rcna156635>

³ Stepheny Price & Bill Melugin, *Authorities Nab 8 Suspected Terrorists with Ties to Isis in Multi-City Sting Operation*, FOX NEWS (June 12, 2024), <https://www.foxnews.com/us/authorities-nab-8-suspected-terrorists-ties-isis-multi-city-sting-operation>

⁴ U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION, CBP ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS, <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/cbp-enforcement-statistics>

noted days before these arrests, the FBI has “seen the threat from foreign terrorists rise to a whole another [sic] level.”⁵

The American people deserve to feel safe from terrorist threats within our country, but it is clear that this administration’s policies have made all of our communities less safe. At the very least, Americans deserve to know the full extent of the threat posed by these eight suspected terrorists who managed to gain entry into our country. Please respond to the following questions by **June 25, 2024**:

1. What are the names of the eight Tajikistani nationals who were arrested by ICE?
 - a. Were these individuals were affiliated with ISIS or another terrorist organization?
2. What was the full extent of vetting that these individuals underwent?
 - a. Can you confirm that these individuals were deemed “fully vetted” by border officials when they entered the country?
 - b. The Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Inspector General (OIG) released a recent report urging improvement to its screening and vetting procedures for immigrants.⁶ Why were stricter vetting procedures not already in place? What is your timeline for implementing the OIG’s recommendations?
3. When did these individuals enter the United States?
4. It has been reported that one of these suspected terrorists was heard on a wiretap discussing bombs. Can you confirm that reporting?
 - a. Following the arrest of these individuals, did ICE discover any weapons or explosive devices in their possession?
5. Have you learned any information about whether these suspected terrorists planned to engage in terrorist activity in the United States?

⁵ Danielle Wallace, *FBI Director Wray Warned of Terror Threat Posed by Open Border Days Before 8 ISIS suspects arrested across US*, FOX NEWS (June 12, 2024), <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/fbi-director-wray-warned-terror-threat-posed-open-border-days-before-8-isis-suspects-arrested-across-us>

⁶ United States Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, *OIG-24-27, DHS Needs to Improve Its Screening and Vetting of Asylum Seekers and Noncitizens Applying for Admission into the United States (Redacted)*, (June 7, 2024), <https://www.oig.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2024-06/OIG-24-27-Jun24-Redacted.pdf>.

6. What efforts is the Biden administration taking to ensure the United States has access to foreign countries' criminal databases to be used for background checks of individuals that arrive at our borders?

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Marsha Blackburn
Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator