

The Escalating Terrorist Threats at US-Mexico Border

A new interim staff report released on August 5, 2024, by the House Judiciary Committee and Immigration Subcommittee raises alarming concerns about terrorist threats stemming from the US-Mexico border.

The report, titled "Terror at Our Door: How the Biden-Harris Administration's Open-Borders Policies Undermine National Security and Endanger Americans," claims the current administration's immigration policies have created significant national security risks.

1. Dramatic increase in terrorist watchlist encounters: Under the Biden administration, from January 2021 to July 2024, **Border Patrol has encountered at least 375 individuals on the terrorist watchlist along the southwest border**. This represents a more than 3,000% increase compared to the entire Trump administration (p. 7). The report notes that in fiscal year 2022 alone, 98 watchlisted individuals were apprehended, compared to just 15 in fiscal year 2021 (p. 6-7).
2. Release of potential terrorists: Of over 250 watchlisted individuals encountered between fiscal years 2021-2023, the **Department of Homeland Security (DHS) released at least 99 of these terrorists into American communities**. An additional 34 remain in DHS custody but have not been removed from the United States (p. 8-9).
3. Inadequate vetting: The report argues that immigrants are only screened against US databases and INTERPOL, not those of their home countries. Former Border Patrol Chief **Rodney Scott is quoted saying illegal aliens at the border are essentially "vetted against a blank sheet of paper"** (p. 17).
4. Difficulties tracking released individuals: An ICE official testified that locating potential national security threats after release is extremely challenging, as recent arrivals have no "digital footprint" in the US (p. 18). A DHS Office of Inspector General report from September 6, 2023, highlighted that "Border Patrol cannot always obtain and does not always record migrant addresses, and **ICE does not always validate migrant addresses prior to migrant release into the United States**" (p. 18).

5. Strain on enforcement resources: The report claims the border crisis has made it "far more difficult for ICE to arrest national security threats in the United States" by diverting resources (p. 19). This assessment was corroborated by a former senior ICE official in an interview with the committee.

The report cites several alarming cases, including:

1. Mohammad Kharwin, an Afghan suspected **terrorist** who was **initially arrested then released in March 2023, spent nearly a year inside the US, was re-arrested in February 2024, then released again by an immigration judge in March 2024 before being arrested a third time** (p. 13-14).
2. A suspected terrorist released by Border Patrol on April 19, 2022, **who was then allowed to board a commercial flight on April 21, 2022,** and remained at large until May 6, 2022 (p. 15-16).
3. The arrest in June 2024 of eight Tajikistan nationals with potential ISIS ties, three of whom had entered the US using the CBP One app (p. 10).

FBI Director **Christopher Wray** is quoted from his July 24, 2024 testimony before the House Judiciary Committee, expressing concern that **"foreign terrorists could seek to exploit vulnerabilities at our southwest border or at other ports of entry, or in other aspects of our immigration system, to facilitate an attack here in the United States"** (p. 2-3).

The report also highlights encounters with individuals from countries of concern. In fiscal year 2024 (as of June), **Border Patrol nationwide has encountered 2,134 Afghan nationals, 33,347 Chinese nationals, 541 Iranian nationals, 520 Syrian nationals, and 3,104 Uzbek nationals** (p. 12).

The report concludes by calling for the Senate to pass H.R. 2, the Secure the Border Act of 2023, which was passed by the House earlier. It states that the Committee and Subcommittee will continue their oversight to inform potential legislative reforms and keep the public aware of what they view as mounting threats to national security.