



**One Hundred Seventeenth Congress
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515**

August 17, 2021

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Mayorkas,

We write concerning potential threats to the U.S. homeland stemming from the rapidly deteriorating situation in Afghanistan. The chaotic withdrawal process imposed by the Biden-Harris Administration has led to widespread Taliban control of the country in a matter of days, resulting in a dangerous new reality for the Afghan people and rapidly mounting security challenges for the United States both at home and abroad.

As you know, terrorist safe havens overseas can quickly lead to plots and attacks against the U.S. homeland. This was true in Afghanistan prior to the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 and has since proven true in other regions like Iraq and Syria. Now, as the American people prepare to solemnly acknowledge the 20th anniversary of 9/11, the United States is again faced with the very real potential for Afghanistan to quickly devolve into a safe haven where terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda can train new generations of fighters. In recent days, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Milley acknowledged to Congress the need to move up the estimated timeline for terror groups to build up their presence in Afghanistan.¹ This comes at a time when the ongoing crisis along the southern border caused by the Biden-Harris Administration's policies and implemented by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) under your leadership continues to strain our frontline security resources. This is despite an unprecedented number of Known or Suspected Terrorists crossing the southern border.²

Unfortunately, President Biden failed to acknowledge these threats or lay out a plan for mitigating them in his recent address to the Nation. As the Committee tasked with overseeing DHS's mission to prevent terrorist attacks on the United States, it is incumbent upon us to seek

¹ Natasha Bertrand, Jennifer Hansler, and Melanie Zanona, "Top US General Says Terror Groups Could Reconstitute in Afghanistan Sooner than Expected," CNN, August 15, 2021, <<https://www.cnn.com/2021/08/15/politics/mark-milley-afghanistan-terror-groups/index.html>>

² Anna Giaritelli, "Suspected Terrorists Crossing Border 'At a Level We Have Never Seen Before,' Outgoing Border Patrol Chief Says," *Washington Examiner*, <<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/border-patrol-chief-suspected-terrorists-coming-across-southern-border>>.

answers to pressing questions related to the security of the homeland. With reports that Taliban forces are releasing thousands of prisoners with Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) affiliations, we have concerns around DHS's ability to track and mitigate terrorist travel to the United States and respond to a new counterterrorism challenge emanating from Afghanistan.³

In an effort to keep the Committee informed of a rapidly evolving terror threat landscape, please provide answers to the following questions no later than August 20, 2021:

1. What efforts, if any, is Customs and Border Protection taking to ensure the National Targeting Center is prepared to track and mitigate potential increased foreign fighter and terrorist travel to the United States from Afghanistan?
2. In light of General Milley's assessment that Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups may quickly rebuild in Afghanistan, how is DHS working within the Intelligence Community to assess and respond to evolving terrorist threats from that region?
3. What parallels does the Department see related to potential homeland security threats posed by the U.S. withdrawal and Taliban control of Afghanistan compared to Iraq and Syria under ISIS control?
4. What efforts are being taken to prepare for the potential for increased instances of Homegrown Violent Extremism (HVE) inspired by the Taliban's so-called Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, as well as terrorist groups seeking to rebuild operations and capabilities in Afghanistan?
5. What threat assessments does the Department intend to revisit with the benefit of hindsight, now that the Taliban has so quickly taken over Afghanistan and without a secure U.S. diplomatic presence in the country?
6. As Afghanistan fell to the Taliban in recent days, DHS issued a revised National Terrorism Advisory System (NTAS) bulletin highlighting risks in the lead up to the 20th anniversary of 9/11 posed by domestic terrorists and individuals with grievances over public health measures and government restrictions, while failing to mention potential threats posed by the situation in Afghanistan. Does the Department believe these concerns present a more pressing threat to homeland security than that of foreign terrorists using Afghanistan as a safe haven to plot attacks?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. Should you or your staff have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to Kyle Klein on the Committee Staff at (202) 226-8417.

Sincerely,

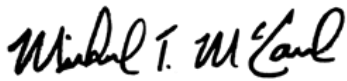
³ Ivana Saric, "Thousands of Prisoners Freed by Taliban Could Pose Threat to U.S.", Axios, August 15, 2021, <<https://www.axios.com/taliban-bagram-prisoners-release-87ec6885-6930-46d6-9e96-473a252dcf7d.html>>.



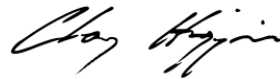
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