

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 17, 2021

Mr. Jake Sullivan
National Security Advisor
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Northwest
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. Sullivan,

Amidst the litany of security, humanitarian, and diplomatic crises emerging from the Biden-Harris Administration's chaotic withdrawal process in Afghanistan, we write concerning widespread media reporting that the Taliban has released thousands of prisoners from detention facilities, including the Pul-e-Charkhi prison in Kabul and at Bagram Air Base.¹ Prisoners reported to have been held in these detention facilities include thousands of Taliban fighters, senior Al-Qaeda operatives, Islamic State Afghanistan (ISKP) members, and former Guantanamo Bay detainees—all of whom pose serious concern to the security of the United States.²

This development is found to be more troubling considering recent reports of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Milley's observation that terror groups like Al-Qaeda could build up in Afghanistan much sooner than earlier intelligence estimates suggested.³ With the very real prospect that seasoned terrorist operatives now roam freely in a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, we write to urgently request information on how the U.S. Government (USG) plans to mitigate threats to U.S. interests and the homeland.

The rapidly deteriorating situation in Afghanistan suggests that the region may once-again return to being a terrorist safe-haven, serving to train foreign fighters while allowing terrorist groups to plot, direct, and inspire attacks against the United States and the American people. The homeland security challenges are further exasperated by the ongoing crisis along the southern border, where the Department of Homeland Security has confirmed encounters of Known or Suspected Terrorists (KSTs) and individuals from countries across the globe.⁴ While U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) plays a critical role in identifying and mitigating terrorist

¹ 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>>.

² Ibid.

³ 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>>

⁴ Stef Knight, "Distant Migrants Now Targeting U.S.-Mexico Border," Axios, May 27, 2021, <<https://www.axios.com/us-border-immigration-mexico-northern-triangle-5a263f5e-eeef-4e8f-9d8e-6a9dd70ed7dd.html>>.

travel, the agency is currently strapped for resources as it manages the fallout from the Administration's disastrous border policies. This troubling reality was recently underscored by the outgoing Chief of the U.S. Border Patrol, who stated unequivocally that "Unprecedented numbers of known or suspected terrorists have crossed the southern border in recent months."⁵

In order to inform our oversight efforts in support of U.S. national and homeland security, we ask for answers to the following questions no later than August 20, 2021:

1. Does the USG have access to census information related to prisoners formerly held at detention facilities in Afghanistan where high-risk detainees were held? If so, what level of confidence exists as to the accuracy of such data?
2. What efforts, if any, are being undertaken to identify and track released prisoners from detention facilities who may pose a threat to U.S. interests or the U.S. homeland?
3. Is the USG aware of any recently-released individuals held at Afghan detention facilities who were previously involved in terrorist plotting against the United States? If so, please describe who, how many, and in what terrorist activities they engaged.
4. What options exist to prevent released prisoners with terror-affiliations from contributing to the build-up of al Qaeda or other terror groups in Afghanistan or traveling abroad to engage in acts of terrorism?
5. What steps, if any, are being taken by CBP's National Targeting Center to track and mitigate potential travel by foreign fighters and other terrorist operatives emanating from Afghanistan?
6. Please describe information sharing efforts, to the extent they exist, among the Intelligence Community, CBP, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement related to the travel of watchlisted individuals seeking to exploit vulnerabilities along the southwest border.
7. What steps, if any, has the USG taken to match or add individuals held at Pul-e-Charkhi or other facilities to the Terror Screening Database in order to ensure adequate vetting should any released prisoners attempt to travel internationally?
8. How can DHS leverage existing assets, such as BITMAP, to support other federal agencies, state and local law enforcement, as well as partner nations throughout the Western Hemisphere to identify and track KSTs?

As the American people prepare to mark the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, we are soberly reminded of the dangers posed to the homeland by threats borne out of terror safe havens, like Afghanistan.

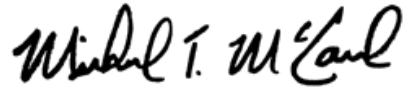
⁵ Anna Giaritelli, "Suspected Terrorists Crossing Border 'At a Level We Have Never Seen Before,' Outgoing Border Patrol Chief Says," *Washington Examiner*, <<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/border-patrol-chief-suspected-terrorists-coming-across-southern-border>>.

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 the Committee on Homeland Security staff at (202) 226-8417, the Committee on Foreign Affairs staff at (202) 226-8467, or the Armed Services Committee at (202) 225-4151.

Sincerely,



JOHN KATKO
Ranking Member
House Committee on Homeland Security



MICHAEL T. MCCAUL
Ranking Member
House Committee on Foreign Affairs



MIKE ROGERS
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee

cc: Hon. Alejandro Mayorkas, Secretary of Homeland Security
cc: Hon. Anthony Blinken, Secretary of State
cc: Hon. Lloyd Austin, Secretary of Defense