



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

Wednesday September 8, 2021

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

Dear Secretary Mayorkas:

As you are aware, the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan continues to pose increased terrorism risk to Americans both at home and abroad. With American citizens and our Afghan allies awaiting permission from the Taliban to leave the country on chartered flights—a previously unthinkable scenario that is wholly unacceptable to the American People—we are urgently concerned about the Taliban’s naming of one of the FBI’s most-wanted terrorist operatives, Sirajuddin Haqqani, head of a terrorist group known as the Haqqani Network, as the country’s acting interior minister.¹

Designated by the U.S. Government as a Foreign Terrorist Organization since 2012, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence describes the Haqqani Network as, “a Sunni Islamist militant organization,” and, “responsible for some of the highest-profile attacks of the Afghan war...”² With interior ministers often holding authorities related to policies governing security, border enforcement, and transportation, we are concerned that the safety of American citizens may now be directly in the hands of a known terrorist operative. We are concerned that this newfound power in the hands of the Haqqani Network may further exacerbate circumstances leading to Afghanistan becoming a terrorist safe haven, accelerating external plotting against the United States emanating from Afghanistan.

On August 26th, a suicide bombing tragically took the lives of 13 U.S. service members at Hamid Karzai International Airport. With Sirajuddin Haqqani having known ties to al Qaeda, including supporting similar suicide bombing attacks, we struggle to understand how the Biden Administration’s reliance on vaguely articulated “over-the-horizon” counterterrorism capabilities will be sufficient in protecting the homeland. Contributing to this concern is Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley’s recent statement that: “...There’s at least a very good probability of a broader civil war and that will then in turn lead to

¹ “Taliban Announce New Government for Afghanistan,” *BBC*, 7 September 2021, <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58479750>>, Accessed 7 September 2021.

² “Terrorist Groups: Haqqani Network,” Counterterrorism Guide, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, <https://www.dni.gov/nctc/groups/haqqani_network.html>, Accessed 7 September 2021.

conditions that could, in fact, lead to a reconstitution of Al-Qaeda or a growth of ISIS or other myriad terrorist groups.”³

In an effort to oversee U.S. Government efforts to prevent acts of terrorism against American citizens and the U.S. homeland, we ask for answers to the following questions no later than September 21, 2021:

1. How is the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) supporting efforts to safely evacuate remaining Americans and Afghan allies amidst reports that the Taliban is preventing flights from leaving?
2. What role does DHS play, if any, in manifesting flights leaving Afghanistan?
3. What intelligence does DHS have related to the Haqqani Network’s operations in Afghanistan and the broader region?
 - Does the Haqqani Network currently maintain external plotting capabilities for terrorist attacks?
 - Does DHS assess that Sirajuddin Haqqani’s appointment as head of the interior ministry of the Taliban’s government signals a close relationship between the Taliban and terrorist groups like the Haqqani Network?
4. What impact does DHS assess the appointment of a known terrorist leader will have on Afghanistan becoming a safe haven for terrorist groups seeking to attack U.S. interests and the U.S. homeland?
5. How will DHS navigate potential interactions with a known terrorist on security issues under control of the Taliban’s interior ministry, including interactions pertinent to DHS efforts to help evacuate American citizens and Afghan allies, such as border enforcement and vetting?
6. With commercial flights resuming out of Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, is it your understanding that Sirajuddin Haqqani’s role as acting interior minister indicates control over transportation policy in and out of Afghanistan? If so, how will DHS work to mitigate threats posed by a known terrorist operative controlling who enters and leaves the country?
7. What impact does having the Haqqani Network ingrained with Afghanistan’s senior Taliban leadership have on DHS’s overall assessment of terrorist threats to the United States?

³ Rebecca Falconer, “Joint Chiefs Chair Says Civil War in Afghanistan ‘Likely’,” Axios, 5 September 2021, <<https://www.axios.com/milley-afghanistan-civil-war-likely-al-qaeda-threat-893db25a-5fdd-4980-b53b-d419b87fb175.html>> , Accessed 7 September 2021.

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 Adrienne Spero on the Committee staff at (202) 226-8417.

Sincerely,



JOHN KATKO
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security



AUGUST PFLUGER
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on
Intelligence &
Counterterrorism