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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6275

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September 6, 2016

The Honorable Jeh Johnson
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Johnson:

I am writing to express my continual concerns regarding the security of our border with Mexico. Recent reports have shown a rise in the organization of known terrorist entities near our southern border, and increased smuggling of these individuals into the United States. This weakness along the border continues to raise considerable national security and immigration concerns, many of which I have raised in recent letters to you.¹

Beginning in 2015, reports surfaced that ISIS was operating training camps in close proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border.² U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) expressed concern that “it would be relatively easy for those fighters to ‘walk’ north to the U.S. border along the same networks used to traffic drugs and humans.”³ In recent months this concern has intensified. In June 2016, news outlets reported that an Afghan national with ties to the Taliban was arrested in Arizona after being smuggled across the border, however, the Department’s

¹ Letter from Charles E. Grassley, Chairman, U.S. Senate Comm. on the Judiciary, to Jeh Johnson, Sec’y, U.S. Dep’t. of Homeland Sec., Sylvia Burwell, Sec’y, U.S. Dep’t of Health and Human Serv. (Feb. 17, 2016), available at [http://www.grassley.senate.gov/sites/default/files/news/upload/CEG,%20JC%20to%20DHS,%20HHS%20\(UAC%20Criminal%20Sponsor%20Follow%20Up\)%202-17-16.pdf](http://www.grassley.senate.gov/sites/default/files/news/upload/CEG,%20JC%20to%20DHS,%20HHS%20(UAC%20Criminal%20Sponsor%20Follow%20Up)%202-17-16.pdf); Letter from Charles E. Grassley, Chairman, U.S. Senate Comm. on the Judiciary, to Sarah Saldana, Assistant Sec’y, U.S. Customs and Immigration Enforcement, R. Gil Kerlikowske, Comm’r, U.S. Customs and Border Prot. (April 5, 2016), available at <http://www.grassley.senate.gov/sites/default/files/judiciary/upload/2016-04-05%20CEG%20to%20ICE%20and%20CBP%20%28Smuggling%24%20times%29.pdf>; Letter from Charles E. Grassley, Chairman, U.S. Senate Comm. on the Judiciary, to Jeh Johnson, Sec’y, U.S. Dep’t. of Homeland Sec. (June 9, 2016).

² “ISIS Camp a Few Miles from Texas, Mexican Authorities Confirm,” Judicial Watch (April 14, 2015), available at <http://www.judicialwatch.org/blog/2015/04/isis-camp-a-few-miles-from-texas-mexican-authorities-confirm/>.

³ Kevin Baron, “US Military Concerned ISIS Fighters Returning to Caribbean Could Reach Border,” Defense One (Mar. 12, 2015), available at <http://www.defenseone.com/threats/2015/03/us-military-concerned-isis-fighters-returning-caribbean-could-reach-Border/107421/>.

National Targeting Center did not flag the individual in its terror database.⁴ Further, an ISIS operative arrested in Ohio claimed that some of his co-conspirators were south of the border in Mexico.⁵

Most recently, a leaked intelligence report from SOUTHCOM that was publicly reported seems to confirm the gravity of the potential dangers at our southern border.⁶ According to news articles, a SOUTHCOM spokesperson confirmed the vulnerabilities addressed in the report, stating: “In 2015, we saw a total of 331,000 migrants enter the southwestern border between the U.S. and Mexico, of that we estimate more than 30,000 of those were from countries of terrorist concern.”⁷ Other outlets report that ISIS training cells just south of Texas are receiving assistance from Mexican drug cartel smuggling networks.⁸

In light of these troubling reports, I am extremely concerned about the security of our southern border and possible infiltration by terrorist organizations and would appreciate answers to the following questions:

1. Was your Department aware of SOUTHCOM’s intelligence report?
2. If so, can you confirm the vulnerabilities addressed in the SOUTHCOM report, as reported by the press?
3. Does your Department agree with SOUTHCOM’s assessment of the border security situation?
4. In particular, does your Department agree with SOUTHCOM’s assessment that of the total number of aliens crossing the southwestern border between U.S. and Mexico in 2015, more than 30,000 were from countries of terrorist concern? If not, why not?

Thank you in advance for your prompt responses. If you have any questions, please contact Katherine Nikas of my Committee staff at (202) 224-5225.

⁴ Judson Berger, “Afghan national tied to Taliban, attack plot smuggled into US,” Fox News (June 3, 2016), available at <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2016/06/03/afghan-national-tied-to-taliban-attack-plot-smuggled-into-us.html>.

⁵ “ISIS Terrorist Tells Feds He Has Jihadist Brothers in Mexico Confirming JW Reports,” Judicial Watch (August 11, 2016), available at <http://www.judicialwatch.org/blog/2016/08/isis-terrorist-tells-feds-jihadist-brothers-mexico-confirming-jw-reports/>.

⁶ Daniel Horowitz, “Jihadists Being Smuggled Through Southern Border. But Can We Even Deport Them?” Conservative Review (August 22, 2016), available at <https://www.conservativereview.com/commentary/2016/08/jihadists-being-smuggled-through-southern-border>; Bill Gertz, “Southern Command Warns Sunni Extremists Infiltrating From South,” The Washington Free Beacon (August 22, 2016), available at <http://freebeacon.com/national-security/southern-command-warns-sunni-extremists-infiltrating-south/>.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ “Military Intel Confirms JW Reporting: Muslim Terrorists Entering U.S. Via Mexico,” Judicial Watch (August 25, 2016), available at <http://www.judicialwatch.org/blog/2016/08/military-intel-confirms-jw-reporting-muslim-terrorists-entering-u-s-via-mexico/>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chuck Grassley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a blue highlight behind it.

Charles E. Grassley
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary

cc:

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on the Judiciary