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DHS Report: 73 Percent of Terrorists Convicted by U.S. Are Foreign-Born

Carlos Ballesteros

January 16, 2018

Federal agencies released a report Tuesday that highlights the number of immigrants arrested and convicted in the United States for terrorism-related activities over the past decade and a half.

The report, issued by the Departments of Justice (DOJ) and Homeland Security (DHS), reveals that U.S. federal courts convicted 549 people with international terrorism-related charges between September 11, 2001, and December 31, 2016. Nearly three-quarters of those charged were foreign-born; 148 of them were naturalized U.S. citizens.

The report was produced as part of President Donald Trump's Executive Order 13780, issued in October 2017.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions and Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen Nielsen both said the report illustrated the need for stringent immigration reform and a substantial increase in border security funding.

“This report reveals an indisputable sobering reality—our immigration system has undermined our national security and public safety,” Sessions said in a press release.

Nielsen added that the report is indicative of current and future security concerns barring congressional action:

This report is a clear reminder of why we cannot continue to rely on immigration policy based on pre-9/11 thinking that leaves us woefully vulnerable to foreign-born terrorists, and why we must examine our visa laws and continue to intensify screening and vetting of individuals traveling to the United States to prevent terrorists, criminals, and other dangerous individuals from reaching our country. Without legislative change, DHS will continue to see thousands of terrorists a year attempt to enter the United States, and while we must be right every time, the terrorists only need to be lucky once.

Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen Nielsen speaks as U.S. President Donald Trump holds a bipartisan meeting with legislators on immigration reform at the White House in Washington, D.C., on January 9. REUTERS/Jonathan Ernst

The report quantifies the national security threat that Nielsen and Sessions cite as a top priority: Since 9/11, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers have removed a little

over 1,700 immigrants with "national security concerns" from the U.S. In Fiscal Year 2017, DHS "encountered" 2,554 individuals on the terrorist watchlist traveling to the United States. Of those, 335 were attempting to enter by land, 2,170 were attempting to enter by air, and 49 were attempting to enter by sea, according to the report.

In an interview with *CBS This Morning* published on Tuesday, Nielsen said the country needs "to continue to enhance our screening and vetting," but also "continually vet" some legal residents.

During the interview, Nielsen refused to answer whether American-born or foreign-born terrorists have caused more deaths. According to a 2016 report from the Cato Institute, more than three times as many people were killed in terrorist attacks by native-born Americans than foreign-born individuals between 2001 and 2015.

Nielsen also cited the report in her testimony before the House Homeland Security Committee on Tuesday in her pitch for more stringent border security measures.

The report is expected to play a role in this week's congressional negotiations over protections for unauthorized and undocumented immigrants who entered the U.S. as minors. Republicans and Trump insist that any deal to protect the so-called Dreamers must include funding for a border wall along the U.S.-Mexico border and other security measures. Democrats have balked at the GOP's proposals, arguing that Dreamers should not be used as "bargaining chips."

For Avidah Moussavian, a senior policy attorney at the National Immigration Law Center, immigration hardliners will use the report to advance the Trump administration's agenda.

"The administration is actively conflating immigration with terrorists—they are ignoring acts of violence by white Americans to better serve their agenda," she said in an interview with *Newsweek*. "This will serve the administration's immigration agenda, which boils down to finding every vehicle possible for drastically reducing legal pathways for immigrants to enter the U.S. both presently and in the future."