

The Washington Times

Hamas attack puts new attention on terrorism at U.S. border

By Stephen Dinan

10/09/2023

Hamas' sneak attack into Israel across a heavily fortified border has focused new attention on American borders, where Republicans say the next 9/11-style attackers may be planning to enter — or already have.

Lawmakers demanded that President Biden acknowledge the risks to the U.S. and respond with more border walls, troop deployments and an end to the catch-and-release free-for-all that has allowed millions of unauthorized migrants to disperse to communities across the country.

“We have to take the example of what just happened here and say to our own intelligence, ‘What do we have along our border? What cells have we allowed to come in here?’” Rep. Kevin McCarthy, California Republican and former House speaker, told radio host Hugh Hewitt on Monday.

On the campaign trail, Republican candidates were demanding that the Biden administration change course.

Bernie Moreno, running for the Republican nomination for a Senate seat in Ohio, called for a suspension of all asylum claims through 2025 as a way to shut down the tidal wave of migrants breaching the U.S. border.

“Given the horrifying images we have seen in Israel, America must take action immediately to protect our own nation,” Mr. Moreno said. “Iran’s leaders and the terrorists chant ‘Death to Israel’ and ‘Death to America.’ We must prepare to secure Americans and be proactive, not reactive.”

Analysts said the fear is not so much a Hamas-style assault, with gunmen storming through border breaches to shoot up neighborhoods, massacre hundreds at a music festival and take hostages, but the attack in Israel shatters the idea that the Middle Eastern terrorist threat has passed.

“The United States has been living under this delusion for the better part of a decade that there aren’t groups out there that want to attack Western institutions,” said Andrew “Art” Arthur, who served as acting chief of the national security law division at the Immigration and Naturalization Service and later as an immigration judge. “We know from the Oct. 7 attacks that’s not true.”

He said the comparison between the immigration debate now and the years before 2001 is striking.

The 9/11 Commission report, citing failures that led to the attack that claimed nearly 3,000 lives, said policymakers pondered questions such as the “right level and kind” of immigration, drugs at the border, smuggling organizations’ growing hand in illegal immigration, and migration pressures in the Caribbean and elsewhere.

The commission said little attention was given to the risk of terrorists exploiting the immigration system.

“This is the only reason DHS was created is to prevent this. And yet it’s the most significant thing they’re not doing,” Mr. Arthur said.

He said warning signs are flashing.

The most visible is the terrorism watchlist. The list shows that 151 people have been detected sneaking across the southern border from Oct. 1, 2022, through Aug. 31, 2023, obliterating the previous record of 98 people, also set on Mr. Biden’s watch. During the Trump years, just 11 watchlist suspects were nabbed.

Authorities last year revealed a terrorist plot to assassinate former President George W. Bush through the use of an Islamic State hit squad that an ISIS operative planned to sneak across the border. That operative told an FBI informant that he had already smuggled in two people associated with Hezbollah, an Iran-backed militant movement in Lebanon, similar to Hamas in Israel.

That man, Shihab Ahmed Shihab Shihab, has pleaded guilty to attempting to support terrorists and is awaiting sentencing.

At the Homeland Security Department, the [2024 Homeland Threat Assessment](#) released last month said foreign terrorist organizations remain interested in attacking the U.S. but suggested that illegal drugs and social media disinformation are larger domestic threats.

America’s vulnerability to a terrorist attack linked to a lax border has been heatedly debated, including at a congressional hearing last month.

“Not a single American has been injured or killed by a terrorist who crossed our southern border without authorization,” said Rep. Pramila Jayapal, Washington Democrat.

Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration expert at the Cato Institute, told lawmakers that the watchlist is a poor yardstick for terrorism, given problems with the list and the types of names included. He said most of those nabbed are likely Colombians associated with rebel insurgencies that the U.S. has labeled as terrorist.

“The chance of dying from a foreign-born terrorist attack since 1975 is 1 in 4.4 million per year,” Mr. Nowrasteh said.

Rodney Scott, who served as chief of the Border Patrol until his ouster by the Biden administration in 2021, said the things he sees on the border “scare the hell out of me.”