United States Senate

May 1, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

Your administration's reported plan to accept Gazan refugees poses a national security risk to the United States. With more than a third of Gazans supporting the Hamas militants, we are not confident that your administration can adequately vet this high-risk population for terrorist ties and sympathies before admitting them into the United States. We are further worried that accepting Gazan refugees might cause a crisis at the Egypt-Gaza border, leading to chaos that would only empower Iran-backed Hamas. We are also frustrated that your administration is pushing ahead with a plan to evacuate Gazans from the Strip when there are still American citizens held hostage by Hamas. We demand that your administration cease planning for accepting Gazan refugees until you adequately answer our concerns and focus your attention instead on securing the release of U.S. hostages held by Hamas.

On April 30, CBS News reported that "senior officials across several federal U.S. agencies have discussed the practicality of different options to resettle Palestinians from Gaza who have immediate family members who are American citizens or permanent residents."[1] One proposal involves resettling Gazans who have already made it out of the Gaza Strip and entered Egypt, while another plan seeks to pull Gazans out of the Strip and directly into the United States.

The potential refugees reportedly need to pass "a series of eligibility, medical, and security screenings" before entering the United States. These proposals ignore that Hamas remains in control of large parts of the Gaza Strip, including the border city of Rafah, where as many as 1.4 million Gazans reside today.[2] U.S. and allied officials have very little access to Gazans living in the area, making it nearly impossible to conduct thorough vetting before admitting them into our country. We must ensure Gazans with terrorist ties or sympathies are denied admission into the United States—no easy feat, given the fact that the Gazans were the ones who voted Hamas into power in 2006. Without thorough vetting, your administration may inadvertently accept terrorists posing as refugees into the interior. This is especially the case as Hamas terrorists have a long track record of co-mingling with civilian populations in Gaza.

[1] Camilo Montoya-Galvez, "White House considers welcoming some Palestinians from war-torn Gaza as refugees," *CBS News,* April 30, 2024, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/palestinian-refugees-us-gaza-white-house/.
[2] Connie Hanzhang Jin et al. "War has forced half of Gaza into Rafah. Palestinians there are at a breaking point," *NPR,* March 15, 2024, https://www.npr.org/2024/03/15/1233158434/rafah-gaza-population-crowding-israel-hamas#:~:text=The%20population%20has%20since%20ballooned,has%20been%20pushed%20into%20Rafah.

Unfortunately, the risk of terrorists entering our homeland is no hypothetical matter. Border officials have arrested 169 people on the FBI terror watch lists in Fiscal Year 2023, a record-setting number that exceeds the total of the last six fiscal years combined.[3] Apprehended terrorists include a Hezbollah fighter who intended "to make a bomb" and was headed for New York.[4] Given your administration's abject failure at countering the flow of potential terrorists at our border, how can Congress trust your administration to adequately vet the refugees crossing the Egypt-Gaza border, located nearly 6,000 miles away from Washington, D.C.?

We are also concerned that any U.S. refugee plan may exacerbate the tense situation at the Gaza-Egypt border. Egypt is already concerned that the ongoing conflict may cause a surge in the number of Gazans trying to cross into the Sinai Peninsula illegally. As such, Cairo has restricted its border with Gaza, limiting the number of Gazans entering Egypt. We are worried that if the United States institutes a large-scale refugee policy for Gazans, they may swarm the Egypt-Gaza border in the hopes of leaving for America. We are confused as to why the United States is willing to accept Gazan refugees when even nearby Arab countries supportive of the Palestinian cause refuse to take them in due to security concerns.[5]

Your reported plans to increase the number of Palestinian refugees mark a significant departure from decades of bipartisan precedent. Both Democrat and Republican administrations have historically accepted very few Palestinian refugees, who make up less than 0.2 percent of all refugees admitted into the United States since 2001.[6] We urge you to suspend plans to accept the refugees until you answer the following questions and redirect your efforts to saving the Americans who are still held hostage in Gaza. Our first obligation should be to rescue our own citizens, not Gazans.

Please provide an answer by May 15, 2024:

1. How many Gazan refugees does your administration seek to accept into the United States?
    a. How many refugees would be Gazans who have already fled to Egypt?
    b. How many refugees would be Gazans still located in the Gaza Strip?
2. Given the widespread Hamas control over the Gaza Strip, as well as the dense fog of war due to the ongoing conflict, how will your administration implement a screening mechanism to ensure that those with terrorist links or sympathies are not accepted as refugees into the United States?
    a. Please provide details on how your administration will conduct these screenings when U.S. officials do not have an on-the-ground presence in the Gaza Strip.
    b. How does the U.S. plan to pay for the cost of transport, screening, medical support, and temporary lodging of these Gazan refugees?

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[3] Adam Shaw and Bill Melugin. "Border Patrol stops record number of people on terror watch list at southern border," *Fox News,* October 21, 2023, https://www.foxnews.com/politics/border-patrol-stop-record-number-people-terror-watchlist-southern-border.
[4] Jennie Taer, "Illegal migrant from Lebanon caught at border admitted he's a Hezbollah terrorist hoping 'to make a bomb' – and was headed for NY," *New York Post,* March 17, 2024, https://nypost.com/2024/03/17/us-news/illegal-migrant-from-lebanon-admitted-terror-ties/.
[5] Jack Jeffery and Samy Magdy, "Why Egypt and other Arab countries are unwilling to take in Palestinian refugees from Gaza," October 18, 2023, https://apnews.com/article/palestinian-jordan-egypt-israel-refugee-502c06d004767d4b64848d878b66bd3d
[6] Catherine E. Shoichet, "Will Palestinian refugees come to the US," *CNN,* October 30, 2023, https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/30/us/palestinian-refugees-gaza-war-cec/index.html.

3. Have U.S. officials consulted with the Egyptian government or other regional partners on this policy proposal?
4. Given the necessity of using the Department of Defense to provide temporary housing and support during Operation Allies Welcome, what is the administration's plan for providing temporary housing to Gazan refugees?
    a. Where are the proposed locations for the temporary housing?
    b. What are the proposed locations for resettlement?
    c. Will the temporary housing displace any military personnel?

Sincerely,

Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator

Mitch McConnell
United States Senator

John Thune
United States Senator

John Barrasso, M.D.
United States Senator

Steve Daines
United States Senator

M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator

Ted Budd
United States Senator

Cynthia M. Lummis
United States Senator

Rand Paul, M.D.
United States Senator

Michael S. Lee
United States Senator

John Boozman
United States Senator

Pete Ricketts
United States Senator



John Cornyn
United States Senator



Eric S. Schmitt
United States Senator



Markwayne Mullin
United States Senator



Marco Rubio
United States Senator



Roger Marshall, M.D.
United States Senator



Charles E. Grassley
United States Senator



Ron Johnson
United States Senator



John Kennedy
United States Senator



Cindy Hyde-Smith
United States Senator



Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator



Thom Tillis
United States Senator



Rick Scott
United States Senator



Deb Fischer
United States Senator



Ted Cruz
United States Senator



Tommy Tuberville
United States Senator



Kevin Cramer
United States Senator



Lindsey O. Graham
United States Senator



James Lankford
United States Senator



Bill Hagerty
United States Senator



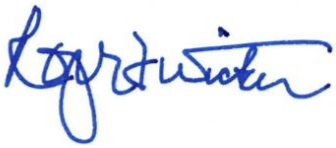
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United States Senator



Katie Boyd Britt
United States Senator



Jerry Moran
United States Senator



Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator