

# AT WHAT COST?

Inside the Trump Administration's  
Secret Deportation Deals

SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE  
MINORITY REPORT | FEBRUARY 2026



COMMITTEE ON  
**FOREIGN**  
RELATIONS

# Letter of Transmittal



COMMITTEE ON  
**FOREIGN**  
RELATIONS

February 13, 2026

## Dear Reader:

For decades, the enforcement of U.S. immigration law has required coordination with foreign governments. But it has never before played such a central and transactional role in American foreign policy.

This report finds that the Trump Administration has expanded and institutionalized a system in which the United States urges or coerces countries to accept migrants who are not their citizens, often through arrangements that are costly, wasteful and poorly monitored. Deporting migrants to countries they have no connection to—once a rare tool used only in exceptional circumstances—has become a routine instrument of diplomacy. This report finds that this shift has had three central consequences:

First, the Administration’s use of third country deportations is coming at great taxpayer cost. The United States has spent tens of millions of dollars to move a relatively small number of individuals to third countries, some of whom, after being flown thousands of miles, are then flown back to their home country, again on U.S.-funded flights. In many cases, migrants could have been returned directly to their countries of origin, avoiding unnecessary flights and additional costs. Instead, taxpayers are funding a global deportation network that is little more than an expensive deterrent with no measurable benefit.

Second, the Administration is conducting questionable deals by making direct payments primarily to corrupt and unstable foreign governments with track records of public corruption, human rights abuses and human trafficking, relying on assurances that these countries will comply with certain obligations. Yet there is no evidence the State Department is monitoring how U.S. funds are used, tracking the treatment of deportees or enforcing the terms of these agreements. In some cases, U.S. officials have been instructed not to follow up at all. This is not disciplined enforcement; it is outsourcing responsibility to governments the United States itself does not trust.

Third, the Administration is not being transparent with Congress or the American people about the extent of its deal-making with foreign governments that agree to take in migrants, including what additional pressures and sweeteners it may be applying or offering up. Even where there are formal agreements with countries, questions remain about whether the Administration has made side deals or is providing other forms of U.S. assistance or favorable treatment. While distinct from third country deportations, the Administration has shown that in pursuit of its deportation agenda, it is even willing to cut deals with adversarial

governments like Iran. Under secretive arrangements, the Administration has forcibly deported Iranians, including vulnerable individuals such as religious minorities and political dissidents. There is no transparency around the full terms of these arrangements with foreign governments and whether these deals have come at the expense of advancing more pressing U.S. national security interests.

Taken together, these practices reflect a troubling shift in how the United States is exercising power. Deportation is being used as a bargaining chip. U.S. diplomacy is being conducted through secret cash payments and quiet concessions. Countries are being pressured with threats of tariffs, visa bans or cuts to assistance. Millions of taxpayer dollars are being spent without meaningful oversight or accountability. And speed and deterrence are being prioritized over due process and respect for human rights.

At a time when the Administration is already straining its relationships with longstanding allies, it is building transactional relationships with corrupt and adversarial regimes—not around shared interests or strategic goals, but opaque deals that do not serve American taxpayers or American security.

As Members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, we believe Congress has a responsibility to understand how U.S. foreign policy is being conducted, how taxpayer funds are being used and whether the Administration’s actions strengthen or undermine American interests.

This report documents a growing system of third country deportations that is expensive, wasteful and increasingly detached from the principles of transparency and accountability that should govern U.S. diplomacy.

We hope this report will prompt serious scrutiny of a policy that now operates largely in the dark, and that it will serve as a basis for restoring basic standards of oversight, discipline and responsibility to an area of U.S. foreign policy that currently lacks all three.

Sincerely,



**Jeanne Shaheen**  
Ranking Member, Senate  
Committee on Foreign Relations



**Chris Coons**  
United States Senator



**Chris Murphy**  
United States Senator



**Tim Kaine**  
United States Senator



**Jeff Merkley**  
United States Senator



**Cory Booker**  
United States Senator



**Chris Van Hollen**  
United States Senator



**Tammy Duckworth**  
United States Senator



**Jacky Rosen**  
United States Senator

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# Executive Summary

Over the past year, the Trump Administration has dramatically expanded the use of third country deportations—in which it deports migrants to countries that are not their own—transforming a narrow and rarely used practice into a standing system of global removals.

Through a growing web of bilateral arrangements, the United States is convincing foreign governments to take in people with no connection to their country, largely through financial payments or pressure. In some cases, the Administration is sending migrants thousands of miles only for them to later be returned to their home country at additional taxpayer expense. The Administration justifies these deals as necessary because home countries refuse to accept their nationals, but evidence contradicts these claims. In practice, third country deportations have produced little measurable benefit while imposing significant financial and diplomatic costs on the United States.

The Administration has pursued these arrangements through opaque negotiations, including with corrupt governments, without meaningful oversight or accountability. Tens of millions of dollars in taxpayer funds have been sent to foreign governments, yet Congress and the public have few details on the terms of these deals, how funds are being used or what the United States is offering in return.

This Senate Foreign Relations Committee Minority report documents the Trump Administration's expanding use of third country deportations. It is based on a review of agreements through January 2026, staff travel to relevant countries and meetings and communication with current U.S. officials, foreign government officials, human rights organizations, deportees and attorneys.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This report covers agreements and reported third country deportations through January 31, 2026. The State Department is actively pressing dozens of other countries to enter into similar agreements.

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This report identifies six central ways in which the Administration's use of third country deportations has undermined U.S. interests:

- **EXPENSIVE AND INEFFECTIVE OPERATIONS:** The Administration has spent tens of millions of dollars to move a relatively small number of migrants to third countries, in some cases paying more than one million dollars per person, with little measurable impact on its deportation agenda.
- **NEEDLESSLY WASTING TAXPAYER FUNDS:** In many cases, migrants could have been returned directly to their home countries, avoiding costly third country deportations. As of January 2026, more than eighty percent of the migrants sent to third countries paid by the United States to take them in have already returned to their country of origin or are in the process of doing so. In some cases, the U.S. paid to fly migrants to third countries only to later pay again for them to fly to their home country.
- **PROVIDING MONEY TO CORRUPT GOVERNMENTS WITHOUT OVERSIGHT:** The United States has sent more than thirty-two million dollars to foreign governments in direct connection with third country deportation deals, including those with records of corruption, human rights abuses and human trafficking, without monitoring how the money is used or whether taxpayer funds are being used to facilitate corruption, human rights abuses or human trafficking. It is unclear how much additional U.S. funding is being redirected to indirectly support these deals.
- **FAILURE TO MONITOR AND ENFORCE AGREEMENTS:** The State Department is not tracking foreign government compliance with diplomatic assurances or enforcing agreement terms, even where evidence suggests foreign governments are violating their commitments. In at least one country, U.S. officials told Committee Minority staff that Trump Administration officials instructed them not to follow up on how deportees were being treated.
- **SECRET DEALS THAT DO NOT SERVE AMERICAN INTERESTS:** Third country deportation agreements have become a central feature of U.S. bilateral relations, involving cash payments, political concessions and coercion, without transparency about the full extent of what the United States is giving in return or the pressures it is exerting. In addition, the Administration is making secret deals with adversarial regimes such as Iran, to accept their nationals back.
- **CIRCUMVENTING U.S. IMMIGRATION LAW:** Evidence suggests the Trump Administration is using third countries to carry out removals that U.S. law would otherwise prohibit, such as sending protected individuals onward to countries where they may face persecution or torture.

## Costly Operations with No Measurable Impact

The total costs of the Trump Administration's third country deportations through January 2026 are unknown but are likely upward of \$40 million.<sup>2</sup> To incentivize countries to enter into third country deportation deals with the United States, the Trump Administration has provided more than \$32 million directly to five countries:

**Equatorial Guinea** (\$7.5 million), **Rwanda** (\$7.5 million), **El Salvador** (\$4.76 million), **Eswatini** (\$5.1 million) and **Palau** (\$7.5 million).<sup>3</sup> Much of the funds were provided as lump sum payments, often before any third country nationals arrived.<sup>4</sup>

The Trump Administration has paid high costs to fly migrants from the United States to third countries, frequently using military aircraft that can cost more than \$32,000 per hour, even for flights carrying only a small number of migrants.<sup>5</sup> For example, flights carrying the 51 individuals sent to Rwanda, Eswatini and Equatorial Guinea over the past seven months cost an estimated \$2.5 million.<sup>6</sup> In total, the Trump Administration spent an estimated more than \$7.2 million on third country deportation flights as of January 2026 to at least ten countries, with actual costs likely far higher.<sup>7</sup>

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2 The United States has provided at least \$32.3 million to five foreign governments in direct connection to agreements to accept third country nationals, spent at least \$7.2 million on flights to move migrants to at least ten third countries and spent \$307,000 to house deportees on a U.S. military base in Djibouti. The \$40 million does not include costs of hours spent on the tarmac for aircraft, costs of aircraft refueling, funding provided to pay to repatriate individuals from a third country, financial support to house some third country nationals in hotels or funding to organizations that may provide short-term assistance to deportees. For additional details on costs, see *infra* notes 3, 7 and 25.

3 Data for Equatorial Guinea, Fiscal Year 2026, USASpending.gov; Press Release, Senator Shaheen, "Ranking Member Shaheen Calls for Answers from Secretary Rubio on \$7.5 Million in Taxpayer Funds Sent to Equatorial Guinea for Third Country Removals," Nov. 10, 2025; Memorandum of Understanding Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Rwanda Concerning the Removal of Third Country Nationals, Signed June 2025, available through the State Department's FOIA Library on Qualifying Non-Binding Instruments; Agreement Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of El Salvador, Ex. 1, No. 1:25-cv-01774-JEB (D.D.C., Mar. 22, 2025); Memorandum of Understanding Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of Eswatini Concerning the Removal of Third Country Nationals, U.S.-Eswatini, May, 2025, available through the State Department's FOIA Library on Qualifying Non-Binding Instruments; Ephrat Livni, "Palau Agrees to Take Up to 75 Migrants from the U.S.," *The New York Times*, Dec. 24, 2025; Minority Committee staff meetings with foreign officials, July to Dec. 2025.

4 See Data for Equatorial Guinea, Fiscal Year 2026, USASpending.gov; Press Release, Senator Shaheen, "Ranking Member Shaheen Calls for Answers from Secretary Rubio on \$7.5 Million in Taxpayer Funds Sent to Equatorial Guinea for Third Country Removals," Nov. 10, 2025; Ephrat Livni, "Palau Agrees to Take Up to 75 Migrants from the U.S.," *The New York Times*, Dec. 24, 2025; Agreement Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of El Salvador, Ex. 1, No. 1:25-cv-01774-JEB (D.D.C., Mar. 22, 2025); Minority Committee staff communication and meetings with U.S. and foreign officials, July to Dec. 2025.

5 Human Rights First, ICE Flight Monitor: November 2025 Monthly Report, at 11 (Dec. 2025); U.S. Transportation Command and Air Mobility Command, FY26, Charter Guidance and Rates for Special Assignment Airlift Missions, Joint Exercise Transportation Program, and Contingency Missions for the Transportation Working Capital Fund, at 14, Table 2, "Non-DoD U.S. Government, Charter Hourly Rates and Minimum Activity Rates for Aircraft on TWCF Missions."

6 See *infra* notes 7 and 10. This estimated cost is only for the third country deportation flights to Rwanda, Eswatini and Equatorial Guinea.

7 This cost encapsulates third country deportation flights to more than 10 countries throughout 2025 and Jan. 2026. Estimated flight costs based on calculations using roundtrip in-air flight times and publicly available cost per hour data for the type of aircraft. Estimated costs do not include time charged for aircraft while on the tarmac, refueling costs or crew costs. Type of aircraft used and estimated length of in-air flight times based on analysis of Human Rights First ICE Flight Monitor data available at <https://humanrightsfirst.org/ice-flight-monitor/> and on X, see e.g., ICE Flight Monitor, @ICEFlightM, "ICE Flight Monitor tracked the deportation flight on a military plane that took 14 third-country nationals to Ghana. The flight left Alexandria, LA on Friday, Sept. 5, refueled in St. Croix before landing in Accra, Ghana. Individuals on board were in straitjackets for 16 straight hours and were not told where they were going until several hours into the flight," Sept. 18, 2025, <https://x.com/ICEFlightM/status/1968682997042778172>. Costs for military aircraft found at: U.S. Transportation Command and Air Mobility Command, FY26, Charter Guidance and Rates for Special Assignment Airlift Missions, Joint Exercise Transportation Program, and Contingency Missions for the Transportation Working Capital Fund, at 14, Table 2, "Non-DoD U.S. Government, Charter Hourly Rates and Minimum Activity Rates for Aircraft on TWCF Missions." Cost for non-military aircraft found at: U.S. General Services Administration,

Despite spending tens of millions in taxpayer dollars, to date, the United States has moved relatively small numbers of third country nationals. As of January 2026, the five countries that the Trump Administration collectively paid more than \$32 million to take in migrants have only received approximately 300 third country nationals from the United States,<sup>8</sup> the majority of whom have already been returned or are set to return to their home country.<sup>9</sup> Of the 300 third country nationals, approximately 250 were Venezuelans sent to El Salvador in March 2025; the total number of third country nationals received by the other four countries was just 51. As of January 2026, the numbers of third country nationals received by the countries the United States had paid were: Rwanda (7), Eswatini (15) Equatorial Guinea (29), Palau (0) and El Salvador (approx. 250).<sup>10</sup> This means that, to date, the Trump Administration has paid at least one country more than \$1 million per third country national received.

*To date, the Trump Administration has paid at least one country **more than \$1 million per third country national** received.*

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"Federal Supply Service Authorized Federal Supply Schedule Price List," (Nov. 20, 2022 to Nov. 19, 2027), available at: [https://www.gsaadvantage.gov/ref\\_text/GS33F017AA/0ZAHLF3V0UG3\\_GS-33F-017AA\\_GS33F017AA.PDF](https://www.gsaadvantage.gov/ref_text/GS33F017AA/0ZAHLF3V0UG3_GS-33F-017AA_GS33F017AA.PDF).

8 See breakdown of number of third country nationals at bottom of paragraph; see *infra* note 10.

9 See Julie Turkewitz and Hamed Aleaziz, "Prisoner Swap Frees Americans in Venezuela for Migrants in El Salvador," *The New York Times*, Jul. 18, 2025; Isa Cardona and Max Saltman, "South Sudan Repatriates Mexican Man Deported From US," *CNN*, Sept. 7, 2025; Natasha Booty, "Eswatini Says It Has Repatriated US Deportee to Jamaica," Sept. 23, 2025; Press Release, Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini, "More Third Country Nationals Expected to Arrive in the Country From the United States of America," Oct. 5, 2025, available at: <https://x.com/EswatiniGovern1/status/1974909942466593081/photo/1>; Daphne Psaledakis and George Obulutsa, "Rwanda Received Migrants Deported From the US Earlier This Month," *Reuters*, Aug. 28, 2025; Minority Committee staff communication with current U.S. officials and outside experts, Aug. 2025 to Jan. 2026.

10 Daphne Psaledakis and George Obulutsa, "Rwanda Received Migrants Deported from the US Earlier This Month," *Reuters*, Aug. 28, 2025; "Eswatini Receives 10 Third-Country Nationals from US," *CNN*, Oct. 6, 2025; Robbie Corey-Boulet and Emmanuel Bruce, "Ghana Took in Trump's Deported West Africans. Then It Forced Them Home," *Reuters*, Jan. 17, 2026; ICE Flight Monitor, @ICEFlightM, "UPDATE: The ICE deportation flight (OAE3991) just landed in Equatorial Guinea, likely removing third-country nationals. The flight originated in Alexandria, LA and stopped in Senegal (likely to refuel), Liberia, Ghana, and Nigeria.," Jan. 22, 2026, <https://x.com/iceflightm/status/2014382068508037375?s=43>; Prianka Srinivasan, "Palau Lawmakers Vote to Block Controversial Trump Deal to Resettle Migrants From US," *The Guardian*, Jan. 29, 2026; Luke Garrett, "U.S. Deports Hundreds of Venezuelans to El Salvador, Despite Court Order," *NPR*, Mar. 16, 2025. Confirmed through Minority Committee communication with advocates, human rights organizations, and foreign officials, Aug. 2025 to Jan. 2026.

The below chart details the cost of third country deportations as of January 2026 to the five countries the Trump Administration has provided payments to in exchange for agreeing to accept third country nationals:

Country	Payment to Foreign Government	Estimated Cost of Flights <sup>11</sup>	Number of Third Country Nationals <sup>12</sup>	Estimated Cost Per Migrant
El Salvador 	\$4.76M	\$428,821	~ 250	\$20,755
Rwanda 	\$7.5M	\$601,864	7	\$1.1M
Eswatini 	\$5.1M	\$1.1 M	15	\$413,333
Equatorial Guinea 	\$7.5M	\$681,670	29	\$282,126
Palau 	\$7.5M	No flights	0	N/A

11 See *supra* note 7 for method of cost calculations and resources used.

12 As of January 31, 2026.

# Unnecessary Use of Third Country Deportations at Taxpayer Expense

The Trump Administration has insisted it must take the extraordinary measure of sending migrants to third countries because their home countries will not take them back.

The Department of Homeland Security has repeatedly stated that third country deportations allow them to remove individuals “so uniquely barbaric that their own countries won’t take them back.”<sup>13</sup> Yet, a review of third country deportations through January 2026 contradicts the Administration’s claims, revealing that many people could have been sent back their home country if the Administration had followed typical U.S. removal proceedings, saving U.S. taxpayers unnecessary costs.

## *The U.S. Government Paid for This*



The Trump Administration sent a Jamaican national to Eswatini—at an estimated cost of more than \$181,000. Weeks later, that individual was flown more than 7,000 miles back to Jamaica on a series of U.S.-funded flights.

13 See e.g., Press Release, Department of Homeland Security, DHS Releases Statement on Major Victory for Trump Administration and the American People on Deporting Criminal Illegal Aliens to Third Countries, June 23, 2025.; Tricia McLaughlin, @TriciaOhio, “NEW: a safe third country deportation flight to Eswatini in Southern Africa has landed— This flight took individuals so uniquely barbaric that their home countries refused to take them back,” July 15, 2025, <https://x.com/TriciaOhio/status/1945274627976200206>.

The home governments of several migrants sent to third countries accepted them back within weeks or months of them being flown to a third country.<sup>14</sup>

Migrants have been removed from the United States to a third country despite having final removal orders to be sent back to their country of origin.<sup>15</sup> Many could have been sent directly to their country of origin, but the Trump Administration did not contact their home government or give governments sufficient notice to process documentation for their nationals.<sup>16</sup> Instead, the Trump Administration is often flying these migrants thousands of miles away on costly flights.

As a result, the Trump Administration has, in some cases, paid twice for migrants' travel—once to remove them to a third country and then again to fly them to their home country.<sup>17</sup> As a current U.S. official privately told Committee Minority staff: "The Trump Administration is sometimes paying the country to take people, flying them there and then paying to take them to their home country. It doesn't make sense."<sup>18</sup> The Administration will likely pay for additional migrants in third countries to return to their home countries.<sup>19</sup>

“ The Trump Administration is sometimes paying the country to take people, flying them there and then paying to take them to their home country. It doesn't make sense.”

– Current U.S. Official, Communication with Committee Minority staff, Dec. 2025

14 See, e.g., Isa Cardona and Max Saltman, "South Sudan Repatriates Mexican Man Deported From US," CNN, Sept. 7, 2025; Natasha Booty, "Eswatini Says It Has Repatriated US Deportee to Jamaica," BBC, Sept. 23, 2025; Minority Committee staff communication with advocates and outside experts, Sept. 2025 to Jan. 2026.

15 A "removal order" is a determination made by an immigration judge or DHS officer authorizing a noncitizen's removal from the United States. Generally, a "final order of removal" refers to an order of removal issued by an immigration judge that has become final based on a decision made by a Board of Immigration Appeals or upon other specified circumstances as set forth in federal regulations. See, e.g. Decl. of Anwen Hughes at 1 and 3, *D.V.D. v. U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS)*, No. 25-cv-10676, Doc. 233-5 (D. Mass. Sept. 13, 2025); Decl. of Mia Unger, at 1, 3, *D.V.D. v. DHS*, Doc. 233-6 (D. Mass. Dec. 8, 2025) (Unger Declaration); Minority Committee staff communication with advocates, Sept. 2025 to Jan. 2026.

16 See, e.g., Hughes Declaration at 1; Decl. of Tin Thanh Nguyen at 9, *D.V.D. v. DHS*, No. 25-cv-10676, Doc. 233-1 (D. Mass. Nov. 13, 2025) (Nguyen Declaration); "Sheinbaum Addresses Case of Mexican Deported to Africa by US: Thursday's Mañanera Recapped," *Mexico News Daily*, May 22, 2025, <https://mexiconewsdaily.com/politics/sheinbaum-addresses-case-of-mexican-deported-to-africa-by-us-thursdays-mananera-recapped/>;

Hon. Kamina J Smith, @kaminajsmith, "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade is aware of reports in the public domain, of the transfer of individuals purportedly including a Jamaican national, to Eswatini. The Ministry has initiated enquiries with the US authorities to ascertain the veracity of the reported inclusion of a Jamaican in the transfer. The Government has not refused the return of any of our nationals to Jamaica, and accordingly, if the reports are confirmed, will continue its engagements with the US on the arrangements necessary to facilitate the individual's return to Jamaica. We will keep the public updated as soon as further verified information is obtained," July 16, 2025, <https://x.com/kaminajsmith/status/1945677928752148770>; Minority Committee staff communication with advocates and deportees, Sept. 2025 to Nov. 2025.

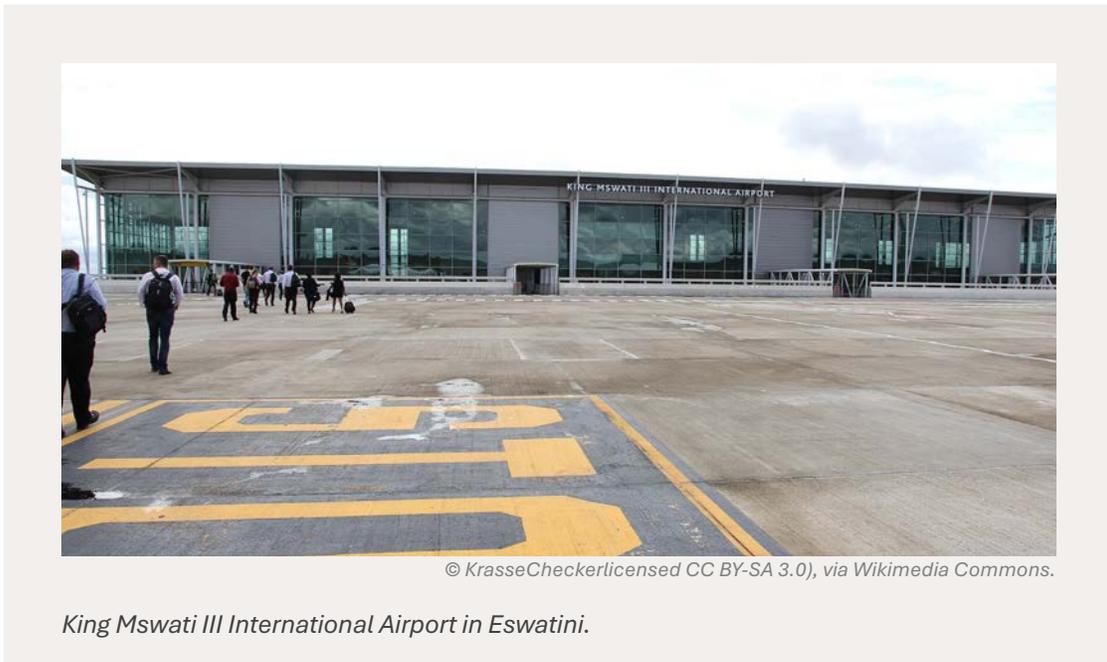
17 See Andrea Salcedo and Samantha Schmidt, "Trump Deports Hundreds to Third Countries, Leaving Them in Legal Limbo," *The Washington Post*, Feb. 21, 2025; Minority Committee communication with advocates, outside experts and current U.S. officials, July 2025 to Jan. 2026. State Department briefing to Committee Minority staff on July 9, 2025.

18 Current U.S. Official, communication with Committee Minority staff, Dec. 2025.

19 Committee Minority staff communication with advocates, outside experts and current U.S. officials, July 2025 to Jan. 2026. State Department briefing to Committee Minority staff on July 9, 2025.

The following are instances when the Trump Administration appears to have paid for unnecessary or wasteful third country deportations, and the associated costs, including double payments for flights:

- **Weeks after the Trump Administration sent a Jamaican national to Eswatini**—at an estimated cost of more than \$181,000 per person—he was flown more than 7,000 miles back to Jamaica on a series of U.S.-funded flights.<sup>20</sup> This Jamaican national had been placed in a cell in ICE custody with other Jamaican nationals in the United States. All of the men were called to leave the cell except for this individual who was then placed on a flight with four men of different nationalities and sent to Eswatini despite his deportation orders to be sent to Jamaica.<sup>21</sup> Jamaican officials said it was not true that their country had been unwilling to take their national stating: “The Government has not refused the return of any of our nationals.”<sup>22</sup>



20 Natasha Booty, “Eswatini Says It Has Repatriated US Deportee to Jamaica,” *BBC*, Sept. 23, 2025; Sarah Stillman, “Disappeared to a Foreign Prison,” *The New Yorker*, Nov. 24, 2025. Use of U.S. funds according to Minority Committee staff communication with current U.S. officials and outside experts. Estimated round-trip cost for the flight to Eswatini via Djibouti carrying five individuals on or around July 15, 2025, is \$906,868. See *supra* note 7 for further details on calculating estimated flight costs.

21 Unger Declaration at 1, 3.

22 Hon. Kamina J Smith, @kaminajsmith, “The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade is aware of reports in the public domain, of the transfer of individuals purportedly including a Jamaican national, to Eswatini. The Ministry has initiated enquiries with the US authorities to ascertain the veracity of the reported inclusion of a Jamaican in the transfer. The Government has not refused the return of any of our nationals to Jamaica, and accordingly, if the reports are confirmed, will continue its engagements with the US on the arrangements necessary to facilitate the individual’s return to Jamaica. We will keep the public updated as soon as further verified information is obtained,” July 16, 2025, <https://x.com/kaminajsmith/status/1945677928752148770>.

- **During a visit to the eight third country nationals detained in South Sudan**, several of the men told Committee Minority staff that the U.S. Government either had not reached out to their home governments or had failed to provide sufficient time to their governments to process travel documents. For example, the Vietnamese national held in South Sudan said ICE officers had prepared his removal documents to Vietnam but were not given enough time to work with the Vietnamese Embassy before he was sent to South Sudan. In court filings, his lawyer reiterated this point claiming that the deportation officer for this case had not submitted a request to Vietnam for the individual to receive his travel documents when the Trump Administration instead put him on a plane to South Sudan.<sup>23</sup> The majority of deportees in South Sudan told Committee Minority staff they wanted to return to their home country.<sup>24</sup> The flights carrying these men to South Sudan cost an estimated \$427,000 with another \$307,000 to house them on a military base in Djibouti along the way.<sup>25</sup>



© US NAVY

*Camp Lemonnier is a U.S. Navy military base adjacent to the Djibouti-Ambouli International Airport. Eight third country nationals were held here en route to South Sudan at a cost of \$307,000 (see infra note 25).*

- **Weeks after arriving in South Sudan, a Mexican national was flown back to Mexico.**<sup>26</sup> The Trump Administration paid an estimated \$91,000 per person to fly him over 8,000 miles to South Sudan instead of returning him to Mexico.<sup>27</sup> Court filings state that prior to his removal to South Sudan: “There is no indication that ICE contacted any Mexican consulate in the United States to request travel documents for [the individual] or to arrange for his return to Mexico.”<sup>28</sup> Mexican officials expressed concern over one of their nationals being sent to South Sudan, saying Mexico always accepts its nationals back.<sup>29</sup> Mexico’s President Claudia Sheinbaum said her government was not informed of the deportation of the Mexican national.<sup>30</sup>

23 Nguyen Declaration at 9.

24 Committee Minority staff travel, Aug. 2025.

25 Senator Warren, Rep. Garamendi, Senator Booker, et al., *Draining Defense: Trump’s Immigration Stunts Cost Billions at the Expense of Military Readiness, Morale, and National Security*, at 8 (Dec. 2025). See *supra* note 7 for further details on calculating estimated flight costs.

26 Isa Cardona and Max Saltman, “South Sudan Repatriates Mexican Man Deported From US,” *CNN*, Sept. 7, 2025. His return flight was not funded by the U.S. Government.

27 This cost estimate takes into account the cost of the estimated round-trip flights to South Sudan and cost of housing the deportees on a military base in Djibouti, a temporary transit stop. Estimated round-trip costs for the flights carrying eight deportees to South Sudan is \$427,008. The cost of housing deportees on a military base in Djibouti was \$307,000 See *supra* notes 7, 25.

28 Decl. of Anwen Hughes at 1 (Sept. 13, 2025).

29 Committee Minority staff meeting with Mexican officials, Aug. 2025.

30 “Sheinbaum Addresses Case of Mexican Deported to Africa by US: Thursday’s Mañanera Recapped,” *Mexico News Daily*, May 22, 2025.

- **The Laos government was told it had less than 24 hours to prepare travel documents for a Lao national or he would be sent to Rwanda.**<sup>31</sup> Despite a willingness to produce the travel documents, Laos was unable to do so in time, and this individual was deported to Rwanda at an estimated cost of more than \$85,000 per person.<sup>32</sup>
- **After paying an estimated \$1.4 million to fly roughly 500 migrants to Panama and Costa Rica,** the Trump Administration then paid again for the majority of these individuals to fly to their home country or another third country—many of which were thousands of miles away.<sup>33</sup>
- **In the case of a Cambodian national sent to Eswatini,** his attorney states: “I know that ICE did not request a travel document from Cambodia but may have requested one from Thailand, where he is not a citizen or national.”<sup>34</sup> He was sent to Eswatini at an estimated cost of more than \$27,000 per person.<sup>35</sup>
- **An attorney for a Laotian national sent to Eswatini—at an estimated cost of more than \$181,000 per person—stated in court filings that the U.S. Government deported him despite having a travel document to repatriate him to Laos.**<sup>36</sup> An officer at the Embassy of Laos in Washington, D.C. said he “was sure the Lao Government has agreed to accept him to Laos and his travel document was issued.”<sup>37</sup>

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31 Committee Minority staff meetings with advocates, Dec. 2025.

32 *Id.* Estimated round-trip cost of the flights carrying seven individuals to Rwanda is \$601,864. Estimated round-trip cost of the flights carrying seven individuals to Rwanda is \$601,864. See *supra* note 7 for information on calculating estimated flight costs.

33 See Andrea Salcedo and Samantha Schmidt, “Trump Deports Hundreds to Third Countries, Leaving Them in Legal Limbo,” *The Washington Post*, Feb. 21, 2025; “Costa Rica Grants Special Status to 85 Migrants Deported From the US,” *Reuters*, April 23, 2025; Annie Correal and Julie Turkewitz, “170 Migrants Deported From U.S. Agree to Return to Home Countries, Panama Says,” Feb. 18, 2025; Human Rights Watch, “*The Strategy Is to Break Us: The US Expulsion of Third-Country Nationals to Costa Rica*,” May 22, 2025. State Department briefing to Minority Committee staff on July 9, 2025.

This represents the estimated cost for the five flights to Costa Rica and Panama, including three military planes (C-17 aircraft). See *supra* note 7 for information on calculating estimated flight costs.

34 Nguyen Declaration at 9.

35 The estimated round-trip cost of the flight carrying ten third country nationals to Eswatini on or around Oct. 6, 2025, is \$278,304. See Footnote 6 for information on calculating estimated flight costs.

36 Nguyen Declaration at 9. Estimated round-trip cost for the flight to Eswatini via Djibouti carrying five individuals on or around July 15, 2025, is \$906,868. See *supra* note 7 for details on flight cost estimations.

37 *Id.*

Rather than deploying an efficient, humane deportation strategy and conducting basic due diligence, the Trump Administration appears to be needlessly spending taxpayer funds—sending individuals across the world and then back again—largely to scare or threaten migrants that the same will happen to them. As Department of Homeland Security spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin stated in August 2025: “If you come to our country illegally and break our laws, you could end up in CECOT, Alligator Alcatraz, Guantanamo Bay, or South Sudan or another third country.”<sup>38</sup> A current U.S. official familiar with third country deportation operations privately described the Trump Administration’s use of third country deportations as a “scare tactic” and “hugely expensive deterrent” meant to keep migrants from coming to the United States, intimidate them into dropping asylum claims or encourage them to “self deport.”<sup>39</sup>

*A current U.S. official familiar with third country deportation operations privately described the Trump Administration’s use of third country deportations as a “scare tactic” and “hugely expensive deterrent” meant to keep migrants from coming to the United States, intimidate them into dropping asylum claims or encourage them to “self deport.”*

“*With countries like Palau or Eswatini, the point is that the Administration can threaten people that they will literally be dropped in the middle of nowhere. The point is to scare people.*”

– Current U.S. Official,  
Communication to Committee

One current U.S. official said the Trump Administration was intent on pursuing third country deportation deals with the island nation of Palau or the country of Eswatini to use as a threat to migrants, saying: “With countries like Palau or Eswatini, the point is that the Administration can threaten people that they will literally be dropped in the middle of nowhere. The point is to scare people.”<sup>40</sup>

38 Kristina Cooke and Ted Hesson, “The US Said It Had No Choice But to Deport Them to a Third Country. Then It Sent Them Home,” *Reuters*, Aug. 2, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/us-said-it-had-no-choice-deport-them-third-country-then-it-sent-them-home-2025-08-02/>.

39 Committee Minority staff communication with current U.S. officials, Oct. 2025.

40 Committee Minority staff communication with current U.S. officials, Dec. 2025.

## No Oversight of U.S Funds to Foreign Governments

Despite sending more than \$32 million to five foreign governments for third country deportation deals, there is no evidence the State Department is conducting follow-up oversight on the use of taxpayer funds.<sup>41</sup>

In an unusual move, the Trump Administration has provided these funds directly to foreign governments, rather than through trusted third-party implementing partners who conduct regular monitoring and oversight, making it more challenging for the State Department to track the use of funds.<sup>42</sup> The State Department is also not using a third-party auditor to track the use of money; instead, the State Department appears to be relying on the foreign governments themselves (some with a clear history of corruption or mismanagement) to report on the use of U.S. Government funding.<sup>43</sup>

As mentioned, several of the governments receiving U.S. funds have well-documented records of corruption, human rights abuses and human trafficking. Without oversight, it is unknown whether U.S. funds are facilitating corruption or other abuses. These countries include the following:

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41 See *supra* note 3 for details on costs.

42 See Data for Equatorial Guinea in Fiscal Year 2026. USASpending.gov; Press Release, Senator Shaheen, "Ranking Member Shaheen Calls for Answers from Secretary Rubio on \$7.5 Million in Taxpayer Funds Sent to Equatorial Guinea for Third Country Removals," Nov. 10, 2025; Ephrat Livni, "Palau Agrees to Take Up to 75 Migrants from the U.S.," *The New York Times*, Dec. 24, 2025; Agreement Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of El Salvador, March 2025, available at: <https://democracyforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Dkt-30-1-Ex-1-to-Withdrawal-of-MDD.pdf>; Committee Minority staff briefings with State Department officials (Jan. 2026) and communication with current U.S. and foreign officials, Aug. through Nov. 2025.

43 Committee Minority staff also confirmed in communication with current U.S. officials, Nov. to Dec. 2025. In his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at a nominations hearing on Dec. 11, 2025, Cart Weiland, the State Department official responsible for signing off on the payment to the El Salvador Government, stated, when asked regarding the tracking of the funds that: "[El Salvador] is under strict obligations to report on how they're using those funds." Committee Minority staff also confirmed in communication with current U.S. officials, Nov. 2025 to Dec. 2025.

# Equatorial Guinea

Equatorial Guinea ranks 172 out of 182 countries for corruption according to Transparency International.<sup>44</sup>

The State Department's 2023 *Human Rights Report* states that "the president and members of his inner circle continued to amass personal fortunes from the revenues associated with monopolies on all domestic commercial ventures" and that "corruption at all levels of government was a severe problem" in Equatorial Guinea.<sup>45</sup>

In 2011, the U.S. Department of Justice pursued a civil asset forfeiture case against Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue, the President's son, who currently serves as the Vice President of Equatorial Guinea, alleging that he amassed more than \$300 million worth of assets through "corruption and money laundering in violation of both U.S. and Equatoguinean law" including through purchasing a jet, a Malibu mansion and Michael Jackson memorabilia.<sup>46</sup> In a settlement with the United States, Obiang Mangue was forced to relinquish assets worth approximately \$30 million.<sup>47</sup> In its 2025 Freedom in the World Report, Freedom House assigned Equatorial Guinea 0 out of 4 for whether "safeguards against official corruption [are] strong and effective."<sup>48</sup>

**Equatorial Guinea ranks 172 out of 182 countries for corruption**

The Trump Administration directly transferred **\$7.5M** to Equatorial Guinea

The U.S. previously sued the current Vice President for amassing more than **\$300M** worth of assets through "**corruption and money laundering**"

44 Transparency International, *2025 Corruption Perceptions Index*, "Equatorial Guinea," (Feb. 2025), <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2025/index/gnq>.

45 State Department, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, "Equatorial Guinea," (April 2024).

46 Press Release, U.S. Department of Justice, "Department of Justice Seeks to Recover More Than \$70.8 million in Proceeds of Corruption from Government Minister of Equatorial Guinea," Oct. 25, 2011.

47 Press Release, U.S. Department of Justice, "Second Vice President of Equatorial Guinea Agrees to Relinquish More than \$30 Million of Assets Purchased with Corrupt Proceeds," Oct. 10, 2014.

48 Freedom House, "Equatorial Guinea," *Freedom in the World 2025*, (Feb. 26, 2025), <https://freedomhouse.org/country/equatorial-guinea/freedom-world/2025>.

There are also concerns about human trafficking in Equatorial Guinea. The State Department’s own *2025 Trafficking in Persons Report* raises as a “significant concern” the “corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes” by government officials in Equatorial Guinea.<sup>49</sup>

Despite this record, the Trump Administration sent \$7.5 million to Equatorial Guinea to accept third country nationals—an amount that far exceeds all U.S. foreign assistance provided to the country over the last eight years combined.<sup>50</sup> The money was directly provided to the Equatorial Guinea government, which had never before been done, outside of the United States giving some limited medical supplies.<sup>51</sup> As of January 2026, Equatorial Guinea has received 29 third country nationals, the majority of whom it has quickly sent onward to their country of origin or intends to send onward.<sup>52</sup> This raises the question as to why the money was needed in the first place and what Equatorial Guinea is doing with it.

In November 2025, Ranking Member Shaheen wrote a public letter to Secretary of State Marco Rubio raising alarm over this third country deportation deal and asking how the State Department will ensure none of the money provided by the United States would be used to facilitate corruption or enable human trafficking. As of February 2026, the State Department has not responded.

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49 State Department, *2025 Trafficking in Persons Report*, “Equatorial Guinea,” (Sept. 2025).

50 Press Release, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Ranking Member Shaheen Calls for Answers from Secretary Rubio on \$7.5 Million in Taxpayer Funds Sent to Equatorial Guinea for Third Country Removals, Nov. 10, 2025. State Department briefing to Committee Minority staff, Jan. 2026.

51 Press Release, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Ranking Member Shaheen Calls for Answers from Secretary Rubio on \$7.5 Million in Taxpayer Funds Sent to Equatorial Guinea for Third Country Removals, Nov. 10, 2025. State Department briefing to Committee Minority staff, Jan. 2026.

52 Sheriff Bojang Jr., “Equatorial Guinea Sends Eight of Trump’s Nine Deportees Home, Braces For New Arrivals,” *The Africa Report*, Jan. 16, 2026, <https://www.theafricareport.com/405291/equatorial-guinea-sends-eight-of-trumps-nine-deportees-home-braces-for-new-arrivals/>; Committee Minority staff communication with advocates and deportees, Jan. 2026.

# El Salvador

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El Salvador has a documented history of corruption and lack of transparency in government spending.

According to Transparency International, El Salvador ranks 120 out of 182 countries for corruption.<sup>53</sup> In its 2025 Freedom in the World Report, Freedom House assigned El Salvador 0 out of 4 for whether “safeguards against official corruption [are] strong and effective.” Salvadoran government officials also regularly withhold information on how they use funds.<sup>54</sup>

The Trump Administration provided at least \$4.76 million to the Salvadoran government in connection with the detention of more than 250 Venezuelans deported from the United States to be used for associated detention costs.<sup>55</sup> The State Department has not made clear whether funds have been used to facilitate government corruption or to house Venezuelan detainees in CECOT—a maximum security prison—where there are credible reports detainees were tortured.<sup>56</sup>

When questioned before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee regarding the use of funds, Cart Weiland, a Trump Administration official responsible for approving the money to El Salvador stated: “The State Department is not in the business of deportations,” referring the Committee instead to the Department of Homeland Security. He indicated the State Department is relying on the Salvadoran government to report on how these funds are used and could not definitively state whether any of the funds had been used to detain Venezuelans in the CECOT prison where they were reportedly tortured.<sup>57</sup>

The State Department’s lack of financial oversight leaves Congress unable to determine whether U.S. funds were misused including whether they contributed to corruption or facilitated human rights abuses.

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53 Transparency International, *2025 Corruption Perceptions Index*, “El Salvador,” (Feb. 2025), <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/el-salvador>.

54 Freedom House, “El Salvador,” *Freedom in the World 2025*, (Feb. 26, 2025).

55 Agreement Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of El Salvador, March 2025, available at: <https://democracyforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Dkt-30-1-Ex-1-to-Withdrawal-of-MDD.pdf>.

56 Human Rights Watch, “You Have Arrived in Hell”: Torture and Other Abuses Against Venezuelans in El Salvador’s Mega Prison, (Nov. 12, 2025).

57 Testimony of Cart Weiland, Nominee to be Assistant Secretary of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Nomination Hearing, Dec. 11, 2025.

## Failure to Monitor and Enforce Agreements with Foreign Governments

The Trump Administration does not appear to be monitoring whether foreign governments are complying with their obligations under third country deportation agreements nor seeking to hold foreign governments accountable for violating agreement obligations.

Many of the third country deportation agreements include blanket language on upholding international human rights laws like ensuring migrants are not tortured, arbitrarily detained or sent to another country where they could be harmed or killed. When negotiating these deportation agreements, the State Department is responsible for assessing whether a foreign government's diplomatic assurances are "credible" that they will uphold these obligations.<sup>58</sup>

Yet the Trump Administration has provided no evidence of systematic monitoring, follow-up or enforcement, raising serious concerns that the assurances made by foreign governments exist only on paper and that the United States is turning a blind eye to what happens to migrants in third countries. This also undermines the credibility of the Administration's assessments of diplomatic assurances in future third country deportation agreements.

Several countries selected for third country deportations had well-known records of human rights abuses before agreements were signed. In El Salvador, for example, its CECOT prison, where more than 250 Venezuelans from the United States were later held, was known for its harsh conditions with reports of deaths, torture and enforced disappearances.<sup>59</sup> In South Sudan, the State Department's *2025 Human Rights Report* stated that the country had "significant human rights issues includ[ing] credible reports of arbitrary or unlawful



*In South Sudan, deportees were kept in a gated house with armed guards. U.S. Embassy officials had not visited the deportees.*

<sup>58</sup> See ICE Memo, Third Country Removals Following the Supreme Court's Order in *Department of Homeland Security v. D.V.D.*, No. 24A1153 (U.S. June 23, 2025)," filed in *D.V.D. v. DHS*, No. 25-cv-10676, Doc. 190-1 (D. Mass. (July 15, 2025).

<sup>59</sup> Press Release, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "UN experts alarmed at illegal deportations from the United States to El Salvador," April 30, 2025.

killings; disappearances; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment [and] arbitrary arrest or detention.”<sup>60</sup>

External reporting and court filings have documented human rights abuses occurring under third country agreements including claims of torture in a maximum-security prison in El Salvador, detainees held incommunicado in Eswatini and deportees removed to Ghana sent onward to countries where they are likely to face persecution or torture.<sup>61</sup>

Despite these concerns, the State Department is not monitoring what foreign governments do once third country nationals arrive in another country, appearing to rely solely on diplomatic assurances. When questioned before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee about allegations of torture against third country nationals in a Salvadoran prison, Cart Weiland, a Trump Administration official who helped establish the third country deportation agreement, could not articulate whether any oversight on their treatment had been conducted. Instead, he reiterated that “the agreement has a provision that explicitly mandates adherence to international human rights treaties and conventions.”<sup>62</sup> While traveling, Committee Minority staff heard from U.S. officials in one country that had received third country nationals that they were instructed by Administration officials not to follow up on the treatment of deportees. In South Sudan, Committee Minority staff were the first people other than South Sudanese officials to visit third country nationals deported to the country.

Trump Administration officials have acknowledged that foreign governments are not upholding the assurances they provided to the United States and that the Administration is not taking steps to address these violations. In a U.S. federal court case regarding third country deportations to Ghana, a Trump Administration attorney agreed that it appeared Ghana was violating assurances it had provided the United States, including that it would comply with the Convention Against Torture, after sending a migrant onward to a country where they would likely be tortured.<sup>63</sup> The Federal District Court Judge required the Trump Administration to file a declaration describing its efforts to keep third country nationals from being sent to a country where they fear persecution or torture. In the Administration’s September 2025

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60 U.S. State Department, “South Sudan,” 2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, (Aug. 12, 2025).

61 See Human Rights Watch, “You Have Arrived in Hell”: Torture and Other Abuses Against Venezuelans in El Salvador’s Mega Prison, (Nov. 12, 2025), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/11/12/you-have-arrived-in-hell/torture-and-other-abuses-against-venezuelans-in-el>; Geral Imray, “3 deported by U.S. held in African prison despite completing sentences, lawyers say,” Associated Press, Sept. 2, 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/3-deported-by-u-s-held-in-african-prison-despite-completing-sentences-lawyers-say>; Edward Acquah, Wilson McMakin and Rebecca Santana, “Immigrants deported from U.S. to Ghana are sent home, where lawyers say some could face torture,” Associated Press, Sept. 15, 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/immigrants-deported-from-u-s-to-ghana-are-sent-home-where-lawyers-say-some-could-face-torture>.

62 Testimony of Cart Weiland, Nominee to be Assistant Secretary of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Nomination Hearing, Dec. 11, 2025.

63 Mem. Op., *D.A. et al. v. Noem et al.*, No. 1:25-cv-03135 Doc. 41 at 3 (D.D.C. Sept. 15, 2025).

declaration, the then-acting head of the State Department’s Africa Bureau said the Administration was not taking any action, stating:

*“Prior to these removals, the U.S. government received diplomatic assurances from the Government of Ghana, communicated to the U.S. government by diplomatic note. As of the time of this filing, I am not aware that the Department of State, including through the U.S. Embassy in Ghana, has made any additional efforts to keep Plaintiffs from being removed from Ghana to their country of origin or other countries where they fear persecution or torture.”<sup>64</sup>*

The Trump Administration’s defense is that the United States “does not have the power to tell Ghana what to do.”<sup>65</sup> The Administration has used similar claims regarding Venezuelans sent from the United States to El Salvador where there are credible reports that deportees were tortured.<sup>66</sup>

The Trump Administration’s lack of oversight on agreements, as well as documented non-compliance with agreements by foreign governments, calls into question the State Department’s assessment of credible diplomatic assurances related to future third country deportation agreements.

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64 Decl. of Jonathan G. Pratt at 3, *D.A. et al. v. Noem et al.*, No. 1:25-cv-03135 (D.D.C. Sept. 13, 2025) (Pratt Declaration).

65 Mem. Op., *D.A. et al. v. Noem et al.*, No. 1:25-cv-03135, Doc. 41 at 3 (D.D.C. Sept. 15, 2025).

66 See Julie Turkewitz, Tibisay Romero, Sheyla Urdaneta and Isayen Herrera, “You Are All Terrorists’: Four Months in a Salvadoran Prison,” *The New York Times*, Nov. 8, 2025; Human Rights Watch, “You Have Arrived in Hell’: Torture and Other Abuses Against Venezuelans in El Salvador’s Mega Prison, (Nov. 12, 2025), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/11/12/you-have-arrived-in-hell/torture-and-other-abuses-against-venezuelans-in-el>.

# Secret Deal-Making that Does Not Serve American Interests

In its effort to establish third country deportation agreements with dozens of countries, the Trump Administration has struck deals with or pressured foreign governments, with no transparency. Faced with increased tariffs, travel bans and cuts to U.S. foreign aid, some countries have been pressured into these deals. Other countries have sought to leverage negotiations for their own interests, that may not benefit the American people.<sup>67</sup> The Trump Administration is expending political capital in its bilateral relationships that could instead be used to advance more pressing U.S. national security interests, while not being transparent about the full extent of its deal-making including what is being offered to foreign governments.

**Countries With Third Country Deportation Agreements or That Have Received Third Country Nationals**



ANTIGUA & BARBUDA  
BELIZE  
CABO VERDE  
CAMEROON  
COSTA RICA

DOMINICA  
ECUADOR  
EL SALVADOR  
EQUATORIAL GUINEA  
ESWATINI

GHANA  
GUATEMALA  
GUYANA  
HONDURAS  
KOSOVO

LIBERIA  
MEXICO  
PALAU  
PANAMA  
PARAGUAY

RWANDA  
SAINT KITTS & NEVIS  
SOUTH SUDAN  
UGANDA  
UZBEKISTAN

As of January 31, 2026.

<sup>67</sup> See Joseph Falzetta, "After Accepting US Deportees, South Sudan Wanted Sanctions Relief For Top Officials, Documents Show," *AP News*, Jan. 24, 2026; Committee Minority staff meetings with foreign government officials.

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One country the Trump Administration worked with was South Sudan, a war-torn country ranked 181 out of the 182 countries for government corruption by Transparency International.<sup>68</sup>

In exchange for taking in just eight third country nationals, South Sudan asked the United States to consider lifting targeted U.S. sanctions on government officials, support the prosecution of the leader of the president's political opposition and consider investing in South Sudanese oil, gas and mineral industries.<sup>69</sup>

In the case of Equatorial Guinea, the Trump Administration's payment to the government was a stark departure from prior U.S. foreign assistance provided to the country. Over the past two administrations, the U.S. Government has not provided more than \$2 million annually in foreign assistance for Equatorial Guinea; the highest the first Trump Administration provided was \$780,000. The provision of \$7.5 million represents an increase of 275 percent and far exceeds the amount of U.S. foreign assistance provided over the last eight years combined.<sup>70</sup>

With the government of El Salvador, the Trump Administration's deal was not limited to money. The Administration also committed to providing an undisclosed amount of additional "in-kind and financial support to the Government of El Salvador."<sup>71</sup> At request of the El Salvador President, the Trump Administration also returned several high-profile MS-13 leaders who had been serving as U.S. informants, undermining a long-running federal investigation into MS-13 and its links to the government of the country.<sup>72</sup>

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Some countries have felt there is no choice but to enter into these deals.

According to former and current government officials for Panama and Costa Rica, their governments felt pressure from the Trump Administration to receive third country nationals.<sup>73</sup> At the time, both countries had recently seen President Trump threaten to impose tariffs on Colombia in retaliation for initially refusing to accept deportees from the U.S. arriving in shackles and expressed concern that the same

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68 Transparency International, 2025 Corruption Perceptions Index, "South Sudan," (Feb. 2025), <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2025/index/ssd>.

69 Felicia Schwartz and Myah Ward, "South Sudan took 8 migrants from the US. It wants something in return." Politico, July 30, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/07/30/south-sudan-might-take-more-us-migrant-deportees-it-has-a-few-asks-00482793>.

70 Press Release, Senator Shaheen, "Ranking Member Shaheen Calls for Answers from Secretary Rubio on \$7.5 Million in Taxpayer Funds Sent to Equatorial Guinea for Third Country Removals," Nov. 10, 2025.

71 Exchange of Diplomatic Notes Between the Government of the United States and the Government of El Salvador, Mar. 31, 2025, available through the State Department's FOIA Library on Qualifying Non-Binding Instruments, May 2025.

72 "Why Is Trump Returning MS-13 Leaders to El Salvador? 5 Takeaways From the Times Investigation," *The New York Times*, June 30, 2025.

73 Committee Minority staff meetings with current and former foreign government officials, Jun. to Nov. 2025. See also Gabe Gutierrez et al., "White House says Colombia agreed to Trump's deportation terms after tariff standoff," *NBC News*, Jan. 27, 2025.

could happen to their governments.<sup>74</sup> Panamanian officials also felt pressure over the Trump Administration's stated interest in seizing the Panama Canal.

In addition to directly paying foreign governments to receive third country nationals, the Trump Administration appears to be providing money to "cooperative" countries. Following a Memorandum of Understanding between Costa Rica and the Trump Administration in support of deportation efforts, the State Department provided Costa Rica with \$9.5 million in deportation assistance.<sup>75</sup> State Department officials said Costa Rica's willingness to collaborate with the United States on deportation efforts, including on receiving third country nationals, was a factor in providing this support.<sup>76</sup>

In certain countries, citizens and governments have protested against these deals. After the United States made a third country deportation deal with Eswatini, civil society and opposition groups expressed outrage. When deportees arrived, Eswatini activists protested outside the U.S. embassy.<sup>77</sup> A coalition of civil society groups released a statement saying:

*"This situation sets a dangerous precedent whereby powerful nations may use smaller, economically weaker states as dumping grounds for unwanted individuals...Eswatini's sovereignty and dignity must not be traded off for unclear deals or political expediency."*<sup>78</sup>

Eswatini's largest political opposition party said of the deal: "this is not diplomacy but human trafficking disguised as a deportation deal."<sup>79</sup> Eswatini human rights groups are mounting legal action, including the Southern African Litigation Centre, which calls the deal "executive over-reach" made without parliamentary consent.<sup>80</sup>

In December 2025, the Trump administration reached a third country deportation agreement with the Republic of Palau.<sup>81</sup> The United States has a unique and vital relationship with Palau through the Compacts of Free Association (COFA), demonstrated by the fact that Palauan citizens serve in the U.S. military. For years, Palau has supported U.S. strategic and national security interests across the region.

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74 "Why Is Trump Returning MS-13 Leaders to El Salvador? 5 Takeaways From the Times Investigation," *The New York Times*, June 30, 2025.

75 Documents on file with the Democratic Staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

76 State Department briefing to Committee Minority staff, July 2025.

77 Savior Kakama and Pumza Fihlani, "Eswatini accepts 10 US deportees despite legal challenge," *BBC News*, Oct. 6, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn5qdx260lzo>.

78 Swaziland Multi-Stakeholder Forum, "Multi Stakeholder Forum Swaziland (MSF) Statement on the U.S. Deportation of Convicted Criminals to Eswatini," Facebook post, July 16, 2025.

79 Rachel Savage, "Eswatini Opposition Attacks US Deal As 'Human Trafficking Disguised as Deportation,'" *The Guardian*, July 23, 2025.

80 Savior Kakama and Pumza Fihlani, "Eswatini accepts 10 US deportees despite legal challenge," *BBC News*, Oct. 6, 2025.

81 Ephrat Livni, "Palau Agrees to Take Up to 75 Migrants From the U.S.," *The New York Times*, Dec. 24, 2025.

By pursuing a third country deportation agreement with Palau, the Administration risks undermining domestic support for the United States from a critical U.S. ally.<sup>82</sup>

In November 2025, the U.S. Embassy in Palau released a video of U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Chris Landau on the Administration's third country deportation proposal and calling on Palau to continue to consider the deal, saying:

“

*The U.S. helps Palau where we can, and Palau helps the U.S. where it can. One area where we've recently asked for Palau's help is immigration... Our administration would greatly appreciate Palau's help on this issue, even with respect to a very small number of people, and we look forward to continuing the conversation with the government of Palau and its people.”*

– U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, Chris Landau, U.S. Embassy Koror Facebook Video, Nov. 17, 2025



**The Trump Administration's deportation deal-making also extends to U.S. adversaries, including Iran, a country with one of the worst human rights records in the world.**

Last year, the Trump Administration reportedly struck a mass deportation deal with the Iranian regime to deport 400 Iranians over the coming months.<sup>83</sup> The Administration has sent at least three plane-loads of Iranians back to Iran, including Christian converts, ethnic minorities and political dissidents who could face persecution or torture. At least eight people from the first flight begged not to be sent to Iran because they were scared for their lives.<sup>84</sup> One man says he attempted suicide at a U.S. detention facility in an attempt to avoid being sent back to Iran but was still

<sup>82</sup> See Bernadette Carreon, "A Country That Said No: Palauans Nix US Proposal to Send Deportees to Palau," *Pacific Island Times*, Nov. 9, 2025; Kristy Needham, "Palau Lawmakers Reject US Request to Accept Third Country Refugees," *Reuters*, July 28, 2025.

<sup>83</sup> Farnaz Fassihi and Hamed Aleaziz, "U.S. Deports Planeload of Iranians After Deal with Tehran, Officials Say," *The New York Times*, Sept. 30, 2025.

<sup>84</sup> Farnaz Fassihi, "U.S. Deports Second Planeload of Iranians, Officials Say," *The New York Times*, Dec. 7, 2025.

deported.<sup>85</sup> An Iranian official said some Iranians accepted deportation because the alternative would have been deportation to a country like Sudan or Somalia.<sup>86</sup> In January 2026, after thousands of Iranian protestors had been killed by the regime, the Trump Administration still moved forward with a deportation flight to Iran, including attempting to deport LGBTQI+ individuals who would be killed if returned.<sup>87</sup>

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**While the deal with Iran is distinct from the Administration's third country deportation agreements, it demonstrates that the Administration is willing to cut deals with any country, including U.S. adversaries, with no transparency about what the United States is offering foreign governments.**

To date, the State Department has refused to brief Congress on the deal with Iran, despite requests. The State Department claims it had no role in working with Iran on this deal, however, public reporting contradicts these claims.<sup>88</sup>

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85 Farnaz Fassihi and Hamed Aleaziz, "It Feels Like I'm in a Nightmare': Inside the First Deportation Flight to Iran," *The New York Times*, Nov. 11, 2025.

86 Farnaz Fassihi and Hamed Aleaziz, "U.S. Departs Planeload of Iranians After Deal with Tehran, Officials Say," *The New York Times*, Sept. 30, 2025.

87 Jennifer Hansler, "Trump Admin Deports Iranians For First Time Since Brutal Crackdown on Protests," *CNN*, Jan. 26, 2026.

88 According to *The New York Times*, "the State Department approached Iran's interest section in Washington about three months ago about coordinating the deportation of Iranian migrants." See Farnaz Fassihi and Hamed Aleaziz, "U.S. Departs Planeload of Iranians After Deal with Tehran, Officials Say," *The New York Times*, Sept. 30, 2025.

# Circumventing U.S. Immigration Law

Since September 2025, the majority of migrants flown to third countries from the United States have had U.S. court-ordered protections, meaning the United States could not return them to their home country due to the likelihood they would be persecuted or tortured.<sup>89</sup>

Yet within days of arriving in third countries—specifically Ghana and Equatorial Guinea—many were sent back to their home countries. According to court filings, U.S. officials allegedly knew this was the plan when it came to Ghana.<sup>90</sup> A federal district judge said of these removals: “These actions also appear to be part of a pattern and widespread effort to evade the government’s legal obligations by doing indirectly what it cannot do directly.”<sup>91</sup>

According to court filings, U.S. officials told migrants headed to Ghana they would be sent onward to their home countries despite having protections.<sup>92</sup> One migrant with protective orders stated: “While at the fuel stop in the U.S. Virgin Islands, the apparent head ICE official on the plane . . . told me that those on the plane were being sent to Ghana and that Ghana would send us to our home countries.”<sup>93</sup> Another migrant with protective orders said that when he told Ghanaian officials he wanted to stay in Ghana for his own safety, he was told that he would be sent to his home country “based on orders from ICE officials and his Ghanaian superiors.”<sup>94</sup> Advocates say Ghanaian authorities are not providing deportees an opportunity to seek protection in Ghana.<sup>95</sup> Instead, most individuals have been sent onward to their countries of origin where some are now in hiding.<sup>96</sup>

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*These actions also appear to be part of a pattern and widespread effort to evade the government’s legal obligations by doing indirectly what it cannot do directly.”*

– U.S. Federal District Judge Tanya S. Chutkan, U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, *D.A. et al. v. Noem*, (Sept. 15, 2025).

89 See Robbie Corey-Boulet and Emmanuel Bruce, “Ghana Took in Trump’s Deported West Africans. Then It Forced Them Home,” Reuters, Jan. 17, 2026; Human Rights First and Refugees International, *Banished by Bargain: Third Country Deportation Watch*, “Ghana,” available at: <https://www.thirdcountrydeportationwatch.org/ghana> (last visited Feb. 9, 2026); Human Rights First and Refugees International, *Banished by Bargain: Third Country Deportation Watch*, “Equatorial Guinea,” available at: <https://www.thirdcountrydeportationwatch.org/equatorial-guinea>, (last visited Feb. 9, 2026). Minority Committee staff communication with advocates, Nov. 2025 to Jan. 2026.

90 Plaintiffs’ Emergency Motion for Interim Relief at 6, *D.A. et al. v. Noem et al.*, No. 1:25-cv-03135, Doc. 18 (D.D.C., Sept. 12, 2025).

91 *Id.* at 4.

92 *Id.* at 5, 6.

93 *Id.* at 12.

94 *Id.* at 8.

95 Committee Minority staff communication with advocates, Nov. 2025. See also Robbie Corey-Boulet and Emmanuel Bruce, “Ghana Took in Trump’s Deported West Africans. Then It Forced Them Home,” Reuters, Jan. 17, 2026.

96 See Robbie Corey-Boulet and Emmanuel Bruce, “Ghana Took in Trump’s Deported West Africans. Then It Forced Them Home,” Reuters, Jan. 17, 2026; Tracee Wilkinds and Rick Yarborough, “Women Deported From Maryland Shown On Video Being Dragged in Ghana,” *NBC News*, Nov. 24, 2025.

In public court filings, Trump Administration officials acknowledged that Ghana appeared to be violating its assurances against refoulement.<sup>97</sup> A State Department official later confirmed the U.S. Government had taken no corrective action.<sup>98</sup> The Trump Administration has continued to send third country nationals there, where Ghana has refouled many individuals.<sup>99</sup>

In Equatorial Guinea, Committee Minority staff understands from advocates that all twenty-nine third country nationals removed from the United States to Equatorial Guinea had U.S. court-ordered protections from being sent back to their home countries due to the likelihood they would be tortured or killed. However, upon arrival, deportees say they were discouraged by Equatorial Guinean officials from applying for asylum in the country and later were told they could not apply and would instead be sent to their home countries.<sup>100</sup> As of January 2026, at least eight individuals have been sent to their country of origin and virtually all have been told they will be sent back despite fear of return.<sup>101</sup> It appears the Trump Administration may have paid a highly corrupt foreign government \$7.5 million to do what the United States could not legally do itself.

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<sup>97</sup> Mem. Op., *D.A. et al. v. Noem et al.*, No. 1:25-cv-03135 Doc. 41 at 3 (D.D.C. Sept. 15, 2025).

<sup>98</sup> Mem. Op., *D.A. et al. v. Noem et al.*, No. 1:25-cv-03135-TSC Doc. 41 at 3 (D.D.C. Sept. 15, 2025); Pratt Declaration at 3.

<sup>99</sup> Sarah Stillman, "Disappeared to a Foreign Prison," *The New Yorker*, Nov. 24, 2025.

<sup>100</sup> Committee Minority staff communication with advocates and deportees, Dec. 2025 and Jan. 2026.

<sup>101</sup> Sheriff Bojang Jr., "Equatorial Guinea Sends Eight of Trump's Nine Deportees Home, Braces For New Arrivals," *The Africa Report*, Jan. 16, 2026. Committee Minority staff communication with advocates and deportees, Jan. 2026.

## Conclusion

The Trump Administration's use of third country deportations has been costly and ineffective, with no measurable impact toward its stated goals.

These deportation deals have transferred more than \$32 million in taxpayer funds to foreign governments with credible histories of corruption, human rights abuses and mismanagement, without meaningful oversight or accountability. The Trump Administration's failure to monitor compliance with these agreements raises serious concerns that the United States may be indirectly facilitating torture, arbitrary detention or other human rights abuses. By bypassing standard U.S. immigration procedures and, in some cases, using third countries to circumvent U.S. laws, the Administration has wasted public resources while undermining basic principles of accountability and the rule of law.

Despite these factors, the State Department continues to pursue additional third country deportation agreements at an accelerated pace, with dozens of additional agreements expected in the coming months. As the Administration aggressively strips hundreds of thousands of migrants of legal status in the United States (through the ending of temporary protected status and humanitarian parole, among other avenues) more migrants will be at risk of being removed to a far-off country where they are not from. Without transparency, oversight or clear evidence of necessity and effectiveness, this approach amounts to an expensive and dangerous form of shadow diplomacy that prioritizes the appearance of toughness over the security of Americans, the responsible use of taxpayer funds and the integrity of U.S. foreign policy.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee Democrats will continue to conduct rigorous oversight of these agreements, demand full transparency and accountability of the Administration and foreign governments and push for monitoring mechanisms on the use of funds and treatment of deportees. In the interim, the Trump Administration should cease its use of these third country deportation deals, which are putting millions of taxpayer dollars into the hands of foreign governments without oversight while turning a blind eye to the potential human cost.