

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 8, 2019

The Honorable Mike Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary,

It appears that President Trump and senior members of his Administration are deliberately carrying out a misleading campaign to justify the President's ill-conceived proposal to build a wall on the southern border of the United States. I ask that you, as our nation's chief diplomat, provide the American people with legitimate facts about security conditions along the southern border, inside Mexico, and the risks that they pose to the United States.

In a recent interview, you were asked specifically about our southern border:

Question: "We've been able to apprehend 3,700 people that we have identified as having ties to terror?"

Secretary Pompeo: "There's lots of risks associated. [...] There are lots of things that come across that southern border that we need to get control over, and President Trump is determined to make that happen. It includes the risk that we have terrorists come across that border."<sup>[1]</sup>

Your response does nothing to correct the misleading question, which has been fueled by factually incorrect statements about alleged terrorists by senior members of the Trump administration, including the Secretary of Homeland Security and the White House spokesperson. Their statements run completely counter to factual evidence published by the State Department during your own tenure. In September 2018, the State Department's 2017 Country Reports on Terrorism affirmed:

"At year's end there was no credible evidence indicating that international terrorist groups have established bases in Mexico, worked with Mexican drug cartels, or sent operatives via Mexico into the United States."

In the last 24 hours, information has emerged that during the first half of FY2018, at ports of entry on our southern border, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) detained six individuals whose names were on a list of known or suspected terrorists – less than one percent of the inflated figure used by Trump Administration officials. In fact, DHS data reflects that

people on the terrorist watch list who were encountered by U.S. officials tried to enter at supervised ports of entry like airports instead of trying to cross the Southern border undetected.

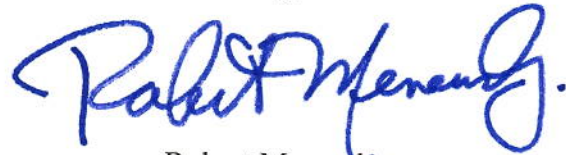
Additionally, members of the Trump Administration have implied that the American people face grave threats from “special interest aliens.” However, such spurious claims are based on the faulty logic that any unauthorized immigrant from a “country of interest” is inherently a terrorist. This assertion was thoroughly discredited in research published by the CATO Institute in December 2018.<sup>[21]</sup> Moreover, this attitude towards immigrants is fundamentally un-American and damaging to our stature as a global leader.

In order to provide the American people with accurate information, I request that the State Department immediately brief Congress and answer the following questions:

1. Do you and the State Department still stand by your September 2018 report referenced above?
2. Has any new information emerged since the State Department published the September 2018 report that would change the assessment that no international terrorist groups have sent operatives via Mexico into the United States?
3. What information and intelligence is available on the 6 individuals whose names were on a list of known or suspected terrorists and who were detained by CBP during the first half of FY2018 at ports of entry on the southern border?
4. If your administration contends that there are indeed thousands of terrorists seeking entry into the United States at the southern border, what are the countries of origin and affiliations of these individuals, and what actions has the State Department taken to address this problem at its root, in the countries of origin?
5. Has the State Department documented any cases of special interest aliens passing through Mexico that have credible ties to terrorist groups, and have sought or are seeking to enter the United States without authorization? If so, how many?
6. Have you and the State Department informed the President, the National Security Council, and other U.S. departments and agencies that there is no credible information suggesting that terrorists are seeking to enter the United States via our southern border undetected in between ports of entry rather than at official ports of entry? Why or why not?

The American people deserve to hear the truth from their government. Thank you in advance for your willingness to provide Members of Congress with unvarnished facts about security conditions in Mexico and at our southern border.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Menendez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "M".

Robert Menendez  
United States Senator

CC:

Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Kimberly Breier  
State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism Nathan Sales

<sup>[1]</sup> <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2019/01/288318.htm>

<sup>[2]</sup> <https://www.cato.org/blog/45000-special-interest-aliens-caught-2007-no-us-terrorist-attacks-illegal-border-crossers>