



# Audit of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Participation in the Handling of Afghan Evacuees During Operation Allies Refuge and Operation Allies Welcome



AUDIT DIVISION

25-056

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **Audit of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Participation in the Handling of Afghan Evacuees During Operation Allies Refuge and Operation Allies Welcome**

#### Background

In July 2021, then President Biden initiated Operation Allies Refuge (OAR), an interagency effort led by the Department of State (DOS) to relocate Afghan nationals who were eligible for U.S. Special Immigrant Visas. After the rapid fall of the Afghan government to the Taliban in August 2021, then President Biden initiated Operation Allies Welcome (OAW), an interagency effort led by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to facilitate the entry of around 90,000 vulnerable Afghans into the United States through a broad range of services, such as immigration processing and resettlement support.

While these evacuation and resettlement efforts were primarily led by DHS, DOS, and the Department of Defense (DOD), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) played a critical support role in screening and vetting Afghan refugees being resettled in the United States to ensure they did not pose a national security risk. According to the FBI, the need to immediately evacuate Afghans overtook the normal processes required to determine whether individuals attempting to enter the United States pose a threat to national security, which increased the risk that bad actors could try to exploit the expedited evacuation. In partnership with several other federal departments and agencies, four primary elements within the FBI supported OAR and OAW through screening, vetting, investigating (when necessary), and the continuous identity discovery of Afghan evacuees after they were admitted to the United States. These included the Terrorist Screening Center (TSC) Operations Branch, the Information Management Division (IMD), the Counterterrorism Division (CTD), and the Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Division.

TSC	IMD	CTD	CJIS
Screen	Vet	Investigate	Continuous Identity Discovery

#### Objective

The objective of the audit was to assess the effectiveness of the FBI's coordination with its federal partners to support OAR and OAW.

#### Summary of Audit Results

The FBI served a critical support function in OAR and OAW by providing the lead partner agencies with timely information to help them determine whether Afghan evacuees, including individuals who may pose a risk to national security, entered or remained in the United States. Overall, we found that each of the responsible elements of the FBI effectively communicated and addressed any potential national security risks identified.

More specifically, we found that the TSC was able to utilize its existing process for screening individuals seeking to enter the United States. Our review of the TSC's screening data indicated that the TSC identified 55 Afghan evacuees, as of May 2023, who were either already on the terrorist watchlist but still made it to a U.S. port of entry as part of the evacuation or were added to the watchlist during the evacuation and resettlement in the United States. As described throughout this report, in each of these cases, we determined that the FBI notified the appropriate external agencies at the time of watchlist identification and followed all required internal processes to mitigate any potential threat. As of July 2024, we found that nine of these evacuees remained on the watchlist, and they were being tracked, as appropriate. The remaining 46 were removed from the watchlist for a variety of reasons, which included a determination by the FBI that the individual was no longer considered a threat to the United States.

Because these 55 individuals either made it to a U.S. port of entry while on the watchlist or were added to the watchlist during the evacuation, we focused our assessment on the FBI's efforts to mitigate the national security risks posed by these specific evacuees. Our assessment included retracing the steps the FBI took related to each of the 55 evacuees to ensure proper notifications to federal partners were made and threat mitigation efforts were initiated internally by the FBI. Based on our in-depth review of the FBI records associated with each of these 55 individuals, we found that the appropriate communications were made and required internal processes were followed in conducting or completing IMD's vetting efforts, CTD's investigative efforts (which entailed obtaining detailed information about the individual and then evaluating the potential threat to national security), and CJIS's continuous identity discovery efforts. Similarly, we confirmed that these same processes were followed for an additional set of Afghan evacuees that we evaluated who entered the United States as part of OAR and OAW and were subsequently identified as being on the watchlist.

We note that, after completion of our field work and during our preparation of this report, the Department of Justice (Department) publicly filed charges against a citizen of Afghanistan residing in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, for conspiring to conduct an Election Day terrorist attack in the United States on behalf of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). According to the allegations contained within the publicly filed affidavit in support of a criminal complaint, the defendant entered the United States in

September 2021. Between approximately June 2024, and October 7, 2024, according to the publicly filed complaint, the defendant conspired and attempted to provide material support to ISIS and obtained firearms and ammunition to conduct a violent attack on U.S. soil in the name of ISIS on election day 2024.<sup>i</sup>

Additional information about this individual and the 55 evacuees referenced in this report is included in an appendix prepared by the OIG (Appendix 2). However, because the FBI has determined that Appendix 2 includes information that is classified and Law Enforcement Sensitive, we are unable to release Appendix 2 publicly. The OIG has attached to this report an unclassified extract of Appendix 2 (Appendix 2 Extract) that the OIG created so that we could publicly release information in Appendix 2 that had not been marked as either classified or Law Enforcement Sensitive. The Appendix 2 Extract also identifies where in Appendix 2 the FBI determined that information is classified and Law Enforcement Sensitive.

## **Recommendations and Views of Responsible Officials**

Our report does not contain any formal recommendations to the FBI. Accordingly, the FBI opted to not provide an official response to the draft version of this report. Nevertheless, we solicited the views of responsible FBI officials and other federal partners throughout the audit engagement and have captured those in the body of this report, as appropriate.

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<sup>i</sup> United States v. Nasir Ahmad Tawhedi, No. M-24-760-SM (W.D. Okla. filed Oct. 8, 2024)

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# Introduction

In the summer of 2021, the United States officially withdrew its military and diplomatic operations from Afghanistan. The collapse of the Afghan central government led to multi-agency U.S. government efforts to evacuate vulnerable Afghans from Afghanistan and resettle them in the United States. These evacuation and resettlement efforts were primarily led by the Department of Defense (DOD), the Department of State (DOS), and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Although the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) did not play a lead role in the evacuation and resettlement efforts, as the U.S. government's primary investigative agency for national security threats, the FBI played a critical support role in the screening and vetting of the tens of thousands of Afghan refugees being resettled in the United States to ensure these individuals did not pose a national security risk. Throughout this report we discuss the FBI's role in, and response to, the U.S. government's Afghan evacuation and resettlement efforts through Operation Allies Refuge (OAR) and Operation Allies Welcome (OAW).

## Operation Allies Refuge and Operation Allies Welcome

On July 14, 2021, then President Biden initiated OAR to support relocating Afghan nationals who were eligible for U.S. Special Immigrant Visas (SIV).<sup>1</sup> On July 19, 2021, the DOS, the lead department for OAR, activated the Afghanistan Coordination Task Force, to coordinate the U.S. government's efforts to bring qualified SIV applicants to the United States once their security vetting was complete. However, within a few weeks thereafter, the Taliban rapidly gained control of Afghanistan's cities, culminating in the seizure of the country's capital, Kabul, on August 15, 2021. This placed many Afghans, including those who assisted the United States or its allies, at increased risk of retaliation from the Taliban, resulting in many fleeing their homes and the U.S. government expanding its efforts to evacuate them.

On August 29, 2021, then President Biden initiated and directed DHS to lead OAW. OAW was a coordinated effort across the federal government to facilitate the entry of vulnerable Afghans into the United States, including those eligible for a SIV, through a broad range of services, such as immigration processing and resettlement support. According to DHS, in the few weeks leading up to the initiation of OAW, the United States evacuated more than 120,000 people, including American citizens, lawful permanent U.S. residents, Afghan SIV applicants, and vulnerable members of Afghan civil society, on evacuation flights from Kabul to locations outside the United States. Then, from the beginning of the evacuation through March 2022, DHS reported that approximately 90,000 Afghan evacuees entered the United States.<sup>2</sup> Around 73,500 of these evacuees had no immigration status and were paroled into the United States, allowing them to enter and remain in the country.<sup>3</sup> The other 16,500 evacuees were admitted as lawful permanent U.S. residents, SIV holders, or with another immigration status.

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<sup>1</sup> SIV applicants were employed by or on behalf of the U.S. government, the International Security Assistance Force, or a successor mission in Afghanistan and their immediate family members.

<sup>2</sup> According to DHS, these Afghan evacuees included non-U.S. citizens whose evacuation from Afghanistan to the United States was facilitated by the United States.

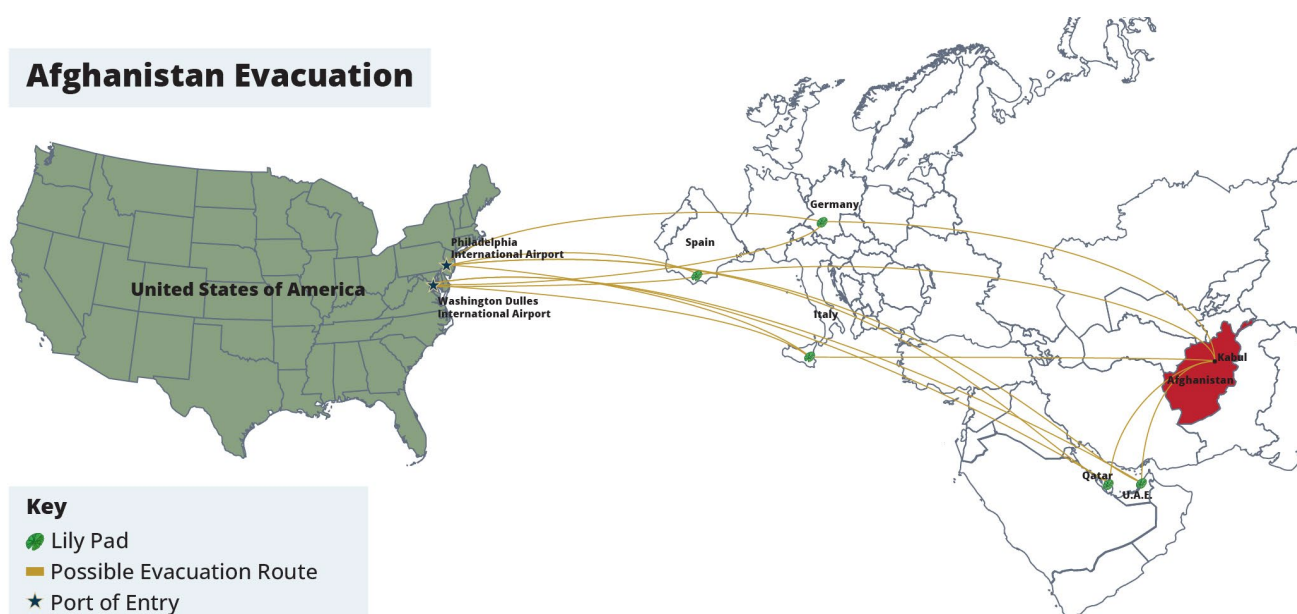
<sup>3</sup> According to DHS, a parolee is a noncitizen allowed into the United States for urgent humanitarian reasons. Parole does not constitute a formal admission to the United States and confers temporary status only, requiring parolees to

*Continued*

As with any population entering the United States, it is the responsibility of the U.S. government to ensure those seeking entry do not pose a national security or public safety risk. However, according to the FBI, during OAR and OAW, the normal processes required to determine whether individuals posed a threat to national security and public safety were overtaken by the need to immediately evacuate and protect the lives of Afghans, increasing the potential that bad actors could try to exploit the expedited evacuation. We were further advised that DHS, in coordination with DOD, DOS, and the U.S. Intelligence community, including the FBI, established a unique process to screen and vet Afghan evacuees. In general terms, DHS described the screening and vetting process as a multi-layered review, conducted by intelligence, law enforcement, and counterterrorism professionals, of evacuee biometric and biographic data along with the U.S. government's data holdings to identify derogatory information indicating potential threats to national security.<sup>4</sup>

Examples of evacuation routes are included in Figure 1 and the screening and vetting process is summarized in Figure 2 below.

Figure 1



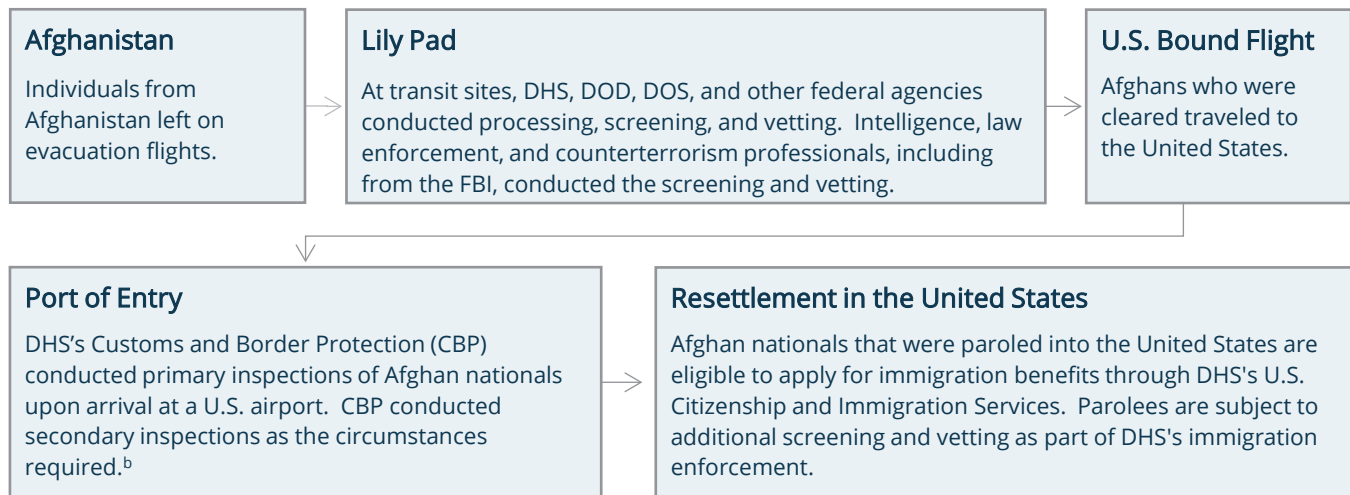
Note: Figure 1 includes some, but not all evacuation routes. DHS identified Bahrain and Kuwait as other transit sites, commonly referred to as lily pads, as well other as ports of entry.

Source: DHS, "[Operation Allies Welcome](https://www.dhs.gov/allieswelcome)," November 27, 2023, [www.dhs.gov/allieswelcome](https://www.dhs.gov/allieswelcome) (accessed March 5, 2024).

leave when the conditions supporting their parole cease to exist. Afghan nationals were originally paroled for 2 years, followed by a re-parole process for a 2-year extension for qualifying individuals. Beginning in September 2022, OAW transitioned to the Enduring Welcome program. According to DOS, Enduring Welcome relies on the standard immigrant visa, Afghan SIV, and the refugee admissions program so that new arrivals enter with long-term immigration status. We did not review the FBI's support for Enduring Welcome.

<sup>4</sup> Biographic information includes unique identifiers such as names, aliases, date of birth, address, passport number, and citizenship. Biometric information includes identifiers such as facial images, fingerprints, and iris scans.

**Figure 2**  
**Summary of Interagency Screening and Vetting Process<sup>a</sup>**



<sup>a</sup> For additional information regarding the interagency screening and vetting, DHS's Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted an audit, which details the process. DHS OIG, [DHS Encountered Obstacles to Screen, Vet, and Inspect All Evacuees during the Recent Afghanistan Crisis \(REDACTED\)](https://www.oig.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2022-09/OIG-22-64-Sep22-Redacted.pdf), OIG-22-64 (September 2022), [www.oig.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2022-09/OIG-22-64-Sep22-Redacted.pdf](https://www.oig.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2022-09/OIG-22-64-Sep22-Redacted.pdf) (accessed April 6, 2023), 6 and 27.

<sup>b</sup> According to DHS, if, upon landing in the United States, further security vetting at the port of entry raised a concern about a person, CBP had the authority to not grant them entry into the United States.

Sources: OIG summary of information from DHS, "Operation Allies Welcome," and the FBI.

## FBI's Role in Operation Allies Refuge and Operation Allies Welcome

The DOS and DHS, as the lead departments for OAR and OAW, respectively, were the primary departments vested with the authority to grant or deny Afghan evacuees entry into the United States.<sup>5</sup> The FBI supported the lead agencies and other federal partners by providing information to help those partners determine whether Afghan evacuees, including individuals who may pose a risk to national security, entered or remained in the United States. The federal partners' reliance on the FBI to provide this information highlights the importance of effective coordination among the partners. For OAR and OAW, the FBI's primary responsibilities included screening, vetting, investigating when appropriate, and performing continuous identity discovery of Afghan evacuees.<sup>6</sup> These responsibilities were assigned to four primary FBI elements: the Terrorist Screening Center (TSC) Operations Branch, the Information Management

<sup>5</sup> DOS's consular officers adjudicate visa applications. DHS's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services adjudicates requests for immigration and citizenship benefits, including asylum, refugee, and humanitarian applications.

<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this report, when we refer to "screening" we are generally describing the initial check used by the FBI and other partner agencies to determine whether an Afghan evacuee was on the terrorist watchlist. Our references to "vetting" describe the more expansive background checks performed by the FBI and other partner agencies to determine if other U.S. government databases contained derogatory information associated with an Afghan evacuee.

Division (IMD), the Counterterrorism Division (CTD), and the Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Division.<sup>7</sup> Summaries of their roles are included in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Roles of the FBI Elements Involved in OAR and OAW**

TSC	IMD	CTD	CJIS
<b>Screening</b> Identify evacuees on the terrorist watchlist.	<b>Vetting</b> Identify evacuees who may pose a threat to national security using intelligence from certain U.S. government databases.	<b>Investigating</b> Investigate evacuees identified as a potential threat to national security.	<b>Continuous Identity Discovery</b> Continually evaluate evacuees on U.S. soil using the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) and Next Generation Identification (NGI). <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> CJIS defines continuous identity discovery as the process of notifying authorized agencies when new transactions match to an existing CJIS record in a CJIS system. The NCIC system is a database of documented criminal justice information available to law enforcement agencies 24 hours a day, 365 days per year. The NGI system provides the criminal justice community with an electronic repository of biometric and identity history information, including over 200 million unique fingerprint identity records.

Source: OIG summary of information provided by the FBI

Screening, vetting, investigating, and continuous identity discovery of Afghan evacuees was a dynamic process taking place at staging bases in several countries, U.S. ports of entry, U.S. military installations, and in U.S. communities, and began during the evacuation and continues today. In the FBI's supporting role for OAR and OAW, TSC, IMD, and CJIS relied on the federal partners to both identify the individuals who needed to be evaluated and to provide accurate biographic and biometric information for those individuals. If any of the information provided by the FBI's partners revealed a potential threat, CTD conducted the required investigative steps that could lead to the opening of a formal investigation, if necessary. In instances when CTD initiated the investigative process, it could use its existing authorities to detect, obtain information about, and prevent and protect against threats to national security and to collect foreign intelligence. The earlier parts of the process—specifically, TSC's screening and IMD's vetting, which often occurred simultaneously—covered Afghan evacuees attempting to travel to the United States, regardless of whether they ultimately made it to U.S. soil.<sup>8</sup> Later parts of the process were largely exclusive to evacuees already in

<sup>7</sup> Vetting was first handled by the Foreign Terrorist Tracking Task Force (FTTTF), which was part of TSC. FTTTF was relocated to IMD in October 2021, and later merged with the National Name Check Program to officially form the Enterprise Vetting Center in 2022. Additionally, in March 2025, TSC's name was changed from the Terrorist Screening Center to the Threat Screening Center.

<sup>8</sup> CTD and CJIS also participated in early parts of the evacuation, including deploying to the lily pads to assist DHS and DOD with screening and vetting Afghan evacuees. DHS and DOD collected biometric data, including fingerprints, to screen evacuees at the lily pads and in the United States. This included screening individuals on NGI, which required significant resources at CJIS. Our audit focused on CTD's and CJIS's involvement with OAR and OAW separate from the assistance provided in the earlier parts of the evacuation.

the United States. This included IMD's re-vetting of parolees, CTD's investigative work (excluding international inquiries referred to the FBI's Legal Attachés), and CJIS's continuous identity discovery of parolees.

## Oversight Work Related to Screening and Vetting of Afghan Evacuees

Section 5275 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, Pub. L. No. 117-263 directed Inspectors General of DHS and DOS, in coordination with Inspectors General of DOD and other appropriate agencies, to conduct a joint review "of efforts to support and process evacuees from Afghanistan," including an assessment of the systems used to screen and vet evacuees.<sup>9</sup> In June 2023, the Inspectors General of DHS and DOD jointly issued an interim report providing a compilation of the work of Offices of Inspectors General (OIG) related to this requirement.<sup>10</sup> This audit adds to the existing body of oversight work related to screening and vetting evacuees and specifically addresses the FBI's various roles in the process, while recognizing that the FBI relied on its federal partners to both identify the individuals who needed to be evaluated and provide accurate biographic and biometric information for those individuals.

## OIG Audit Approach

The objective of this audit was to assess the effectiveness of the FBI's coordination with its federal partners to support OAR and OAW. For the purposes of this report, all references to OAR and OAW cover the activity related to the evacuation and resettlement of Afghan evacuees who left Afghanistan between the start of OAR in July of 2021 and resumption of the immigration rules in place prior to the evacuation, which occurred in October 2022. Generally, the scope of our audit was the start of OAR in July 2021 through September 2023. To accomplish our objective, we:

- Interviewed TSC, IMD, CTD, and CJIS personnel to understand their respective roles in OAR and OAW.

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<sup>9</sup> With respect to Afghan evacuees, Pub. L. No. 117-263 defines screening as the process by which a federal official determines the identity of the evacuee, whether the evacuee has valid identification documentation, and whether any database of the U.S. government contains derogatory information about the evacuee. It defines vetting as the process by which a federal official interviews the evacuee to determine whether the evacuee is who they purport to be, including whether the evacuee poses a national security risk.

<sup>10</sup> DHS OIG and DOS OIG, [National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2023, Section 5275 Interim Joint Report](https://www.oig.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2023-07/OIG-Response-to-NDAA-23-OAW-2023-06-23-DRS-Signed.pdf) (June 2023), [www.oig.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2023-07/OIG-Response-to-NDAA-23-OAW-2023-06-23-DRS-Signed.pdf](https://www.oig.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2023-07/OIG-Response-to-NDAA-23-OAW-2023-06-23-DRS-Signed.pdf) (accessed March 5, 2024). Reports include:

DHS OIG, [DHS Encountered Obstacles to Screen, Vet, and Inspect All Evacuees during the Recent Afghanistan Crisis \(REDACTED\)](https://www.oig.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2022-09/OIG-22-64-Sep22-Redacted.pdf), OIG-22-64 (September 2022), [www.oig.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2022-09/OIG-22-64-Sep22-Redacted.pdf](https://www.oig.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2022-09/OIG-22-64-Sep22-Redacted.pdf) (accessed April 6, 2023).

DOD OIG, [Evaluation of the Screening of Displaced Persons from Afghanistan](https://media.defense.gov/2022/Feb/17/2002940841/-1/-1/1/DODIG-222-065.pdf), DODIG-2022-065 (February 2022), [media.defense.gov/2022/Feb/17/2002940841/-1/-1/1/DODIG-222-065.pdf](https://media.defense.gov/2022/Feb/17/2002940841/-1/-1/1/DODIG-222-065.pdf) (accessed April 6, 2023)

DOD OIG, [Evaluation of DoD Support to Other Agencies' Requests for Screening of Displaced Persons from Afghanistan](https://media.defense.gov/2023/Jun/21/2003245425/-1/-1/1/DODIG-2023-088.pdf), DODIG-2023-088 (June 2023), [media.defense.gov/2023/Jun/21/2003245425/-1/-1/1/DODIG-2023-088.pdf](https://media.defense.gov/2023/Jun/21/2003245425/-1/-1/1/DODIG-2023-088.pdf) (accessed April 29, 2024).

- Evaluated relevant policies and procedures for TSC, IMD, CTD, and CJIS.
- Evaluated data and information from several databases, including the Terrorist Screening System, the vetting management system, investigative case management system, NCIC, and NGL.
- Evaluated the FBI's actions related to 55 Afghan evacuees to determine whether they were screened, vetted, investigated, and subject to continuous identity discovery in accordance with applicable guidance.
- Obtained the views of federal partners, including DHS and DOD, related to their experiences working with the FBI during OAR and OAW.

In addition, we provided the FBI an official draft copy of this report for review and comment. Because our draft report did not contain any formal recommendations to the FBI, the FBI opted to not provide an official response. We solicited the views of responsible FBI officials and other federal partners throughout the audit engagement and have captured those in the body of this report, as appropriate.

Appendix 1 further details our audit objective, scope, and methodology.

## Audit Results

The FBI served a critical support function in the mass evacuation of vulnerable Afghans from Afghanistan beginning in the summer of 2021 by providing timely information in its possession to the lead federal agencies—DHS, DOS, and DOD—that helped determine whether tens of thousands of evacuees would be admitted to the United States, including individuals who may have posed a risk to national security. Overall, we found that each of the responsible elements of the FBI assigned to support the evacuations under OAR and OAW (TSC, IMD, CTD, and CJIS) executed their respective roles in accordance with applicable guidance. Further, when potential threats to national security were identified related to certain evacuees, we found that the FBI proactively used its investigative authorities and continuous identity discovery tools to mitigate those potential threats.

More specifically, as it relates to the screening performed by the TSC, we found that the FBI was able to utilize the existing process for screening individuals seeking to enter the United States against the terrorist watchlist. Our review of the TSC's screening data indicated that the TSC identified 55 Afghan evacuees who were either already on the terrorist watchlist but still made it to a U.S. port of entry as part of the evacuation or were added to the watchlist during the evacuation and resettlement in the United States. Because of the potential risks associated with this particular subset of evacuees, we focused our work on the FBI's efforts to mitigate these potential national security threats. As noted above, we found that when the TSC identified these individuals on the watchlist, it notified the appropriate federal partner agencies of their watchlist status in a timely manner. We also were able to confirm that IMD appropriately followed its vetting process and searched the requisite databases for derogatory information for each of these 55 evacuees. However, we note that, in the immediate aftermath of the fall of Kabul, the effectiveness of IMD's searches was potentially limited by the quality and completeness of the information being provided by the lead federal agencies. The FBI explained and we confirmed through testing that because some of the evacuees' biographical information provided to IMD by the lead federal partners was incomplete or inaccurate, there was a risk that derogatory information in the FBI's possession could have been missed during the initial vetting process. We believe, however, that the initial risk of failing to identify individuals with derogatory information was largely mitigated through subsequent efforts to re-vet the initial wave of evacuees after additional biographical information was gathered. We also believe that the CTD's investigative efforts, which was the mechanism by which potential national security threats were assessed and addressed, as well as CJIS's continuous identity discovery efforts, further mitigated the potential risks posed by evacuees who had already entered the United States. In addition to evaluating the process each of these FBI elements executed, we also determined that the FBI adequately communicated with its federal counterparts and partners as needed.

### National Security Risks Related to the Evacuation and Resettlement of Afghan Evacuees

Following the collapse of the Afghan government, the FBI identified the risk of bad actors exploiting the overwhelmed evacuation efforts. This included a significant risk that known or reasonably suspected terrorists could attempt to gain entry into the United States through the evacuation. DHS, as the lead department for OAW, with the support of the FBI and other federal partners, implemented a multi-layered review of Afghan evacuees at the start of the evacuation (which continues today) to reduce the risk of an evacuee who poses a threat to national security from entering or remaining in the United States. The FBI has served and continues to serve a critical function by helping identify and investigate evacuees who were identified as potential national security threats. The following sections of this report detail the FBI's

responsibilities in screening, vetting, investigating, and continuous identity discovery of Afghan evacuees who were seeking to enter the United States as part of OAR and OAW. Some of the evacuees who potentially posed a threat to national security were never allowed to travel to the United States. Therefore, our work largely focused on the FBI's actions in relation to a watchlisted (as of May 2023) subset of evacuees who traveled to the United States.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, while some of these activities were happening simultaneously, we discuss each activity separately.

## **Terrorist Screening Center: Screening**

One of the most effective tools used by the U.S. government to prevent known or reasonably suspected terrorists from entering the United States is the TSC-managed terrorist watchlist.<sup>12</sup> The TSC Operation Branch's Threat Screening Operations Center (TSOC) generally serves as the primary point of contact for law enforcement and other screening agencies when they encounter a potential known or reasonably

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<sup>11</sup> On October 8, 2024, following the completion of our fieldwork and during our preparation of this report, the Department of Justice (Department) publicly filed charges against Nasir Ahmad Tawhedi, a citizen of Afghanistan residing in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, for conspiring to conduct an Election Day terrorist attack in the United States on behalf of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). According to the allegations contained within the publicly filed affidavit in support of a criminal complaint, Tawhedi entered the United States in September 2021. Between approximately June 2024, and October 7, 2024, according to the publicly filed complaint, he conspired and attempted to provide material support to ISIS and obtained firearms and ammunition to conduct a violent attack on U.S. soil in the name of ISIS on election day 2024. *United States v. Nasir Ahmad Tawhedi*, No. M-24-760-SM (W.D. Okla. filed Oct. 8, 2024) <https://www.justice.gov/opa/media/1373021/dl>. While the circumstances surrounding this FBI investigation and pending prosecution were not specifically within the scope of this audit, after the Department publicly announced Tawhedi's arrest, we requested and reviewed specific information associated with him based on the dates identified above. Additional information about this individual and the 55 evacuees referenced in this report is included in an appendix prepared by the OIG (Appendix 2). However, because the FBI has determined that Appendix 2 includes information that is classified and Law Enforcement Sensitive, we are unable to release Appendix 2 publicly. The OIG has attached to this report an unclassified extract of Appendix 2 (Appendix 2 Extract) that the OIG created so that we could publicly release information in Appendix 2 that had not been marked as either classified or Law Enforcement Sensitive. The Appendix 2 Extract also identifies where in Appendix 2 the FBI determined that information is classified and Law Enforcement Sensitive. The Appendix 2 Extract is briefly summarized in Figure 3.

On April 17, 2025, the Department announced that Tawhedi's co-conspirator, Abdullah Haji Zada, 18, a native and citizen of Afghanistan and U.S. lawful permanent resident, pleaded guilty to obtaining firearms to be used to commit a federal crime of terrorism. According to the publicly filed affidavit in support of a complaint mentioned above, Zada entered the United States in March 2018, prior to OAR and OAW.

<sup>12</sup> The Office of the Director of National Intelligence's National Counterterrorism Center, which is staffed by personnel from around 20 different federal departments and agencies, serves as the primary organization in the U.S. government for analyzing and integrating all intelligence possessed or acquired by the U.S. government pertaining to terrorism. It manages the Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment, a shared database of information on international terrorist identities and includes the U.S. Intelligence Community's international terrorist watchlist nominations. All watchlist nominations are then sent to the TSC for review and possible inclusion in the federal terrorist watchlist. Watchlist nominations are based on derogatory information, which the TSC defines as intelligence or other information that serves to demonstrate the nature of an individual or group's association with terrorism.

suspected terrorist.<sup>13</sup> TSOC makes final determinations regarding the identity of all potential matches to watchlist records.

Throughout OAR and OAW, several federal partners, which were responsible for different parts of the evacuation and resettlement efforts, screened Afghan evacuees against the terrorist watchlist maintained by the TSC. The screening agencies included Customs and Border Protection’s (CBP) National Targeting Center, which used passenger data from flight manifests, as well as DOD, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and other DHS programs.<sup>14</sup> This screening was performed at many locations, including the lily pads, U.S. airports, U.S. military bases, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention facilities. A screening by one of these agencies resulted in an “encounter” when the individual screened was potentially identified as an individual on the watchlist. TSOC policy states that all encounters should be sent to TSOC by the screening agency for review and identity resolution.

TSOC was responsible for reviewing encounters with Afghan evacuees in accordance with its Standard Operating Procedures, which outline operational and technical requirements for encounter management. Once TSOC received a request from the federal partner to review an encounter, TSOC analysts conducted the appropriate database checks and made one of three determinations: (1) positive match, indicating the encountered subject exactly or reasonably matches a watchlist record; (2) negative match, indicating the encountered subject does not meet the definition of a positive match; and (3) inconclusive match, indicating there is not enough information to verify the subject matches a watchlist record.<sup>15</sup> In verifying whether an individual is on the watchlist, TSOC analysts complete more in-depth searches than the screening agency. This includes using multiple databases available to the TSOC analyst to confirm the identity of the person being encountered and to conduct comparative analysis with watchlist subjects. TSOC then notifies the screening agency of its determination while also entering all of the encounters into the Terrorist Screening System for review by a TSOC Team Lead for accuracy and completeness. Finally, positive encounters were given to the Terrorist Screening Operations Unit (TSOU), which is responsible for ensuring the appropriate stakeholders, including the appropriate FBI program, are advised of the encounter in accordance with written protocol. Specifically, for evacuees determined to be positive matches and already in the United States, the TSOU sent the encounters to CTD.

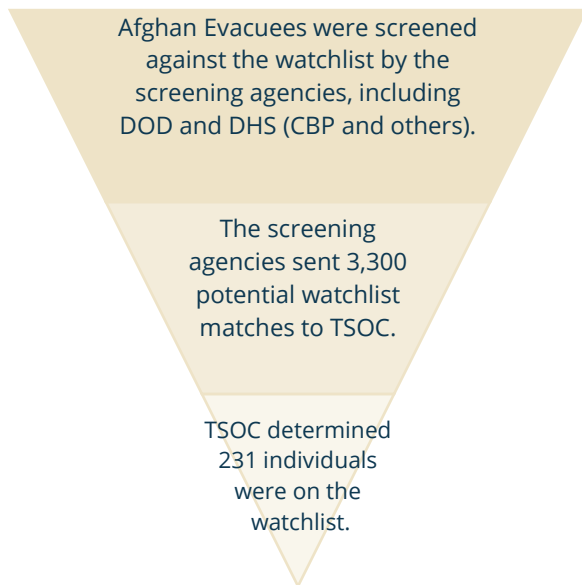


Source: OIG summary of information from TSC

<sup>13</sup> An encounter can be a face-to-face meeting with a known or reasonably suspected terrorist or paper-based (e.g., the known or reasonably suspected terrorist submits an application for a benefit like a visa.)

<sup>14</sup> The National Targeting Center conducts vetting to identify travelers and shipments that pose the highest risk to U.S. security, economy, and public safety. It targets traveler and cargo information to identify and mitigate threats before they board conveyances destined for the United States.

<sup>15</sup> There are two types of inconclusive matches: (1) those that are inconclusive due to a lack of information, such as information for the watchlisted subject being too vague or incomplete, or (2) those that remain inconclusive until additional information can be obtained about the encountered subject. For the second type, TSOC requests additional information from the encountering agency.



Overall, according to TSOC, as a result of the OAR and OAW screening efforts by federal partner agencies, it processed around 3,300 terrorist watchlist encounters between July 2021 and May 2023.<sup>16</sup> Most of these encounters (82 percent) came in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Afghan government in August and September 2021 and most (87 percent) resulted from CBP National Targeting Center screenings.<sup>17</sup>

Further, according to TSOC data, 231 individuals from the approximately 3,300 OAR and OAW encounters were positively matched to the watchlist within the 23-month period identified above.<sup>18</sup> Of these 231 individuals, TSOC's data indicated that 55 (24 percent) of them were already in the United States at the time of the positive encounter.<sup>19</sup>

This suggested to us that several individuals potentially

known or reasonably suspected to be a terrorist (or individuals who are connected to or associated with known or suspected terrorists but who may not themselves meet the reasonable suspicion standard), made it at least as far as a U.S. port of entry as part of the evacuation.<sup>20</sup> In our judgment, this group posed the greatest potential risk to national security at the time of the evacuation because it raised the possibility that terrorists could have entered the United States. Because of the significance of this risk, we focused our work on evaluating the totality of the FBI's actions in relation to all 55 of these individuals to ensure that these potential threats were pursued and mitigated, if necessary.<sup>21</sup> More specifically, we obtained information about the specific circumstances surrounding each encounter for these 55 individuals and the

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<sup>16</sup> Because screenings are conducted by federal partners, not TSOC, we were not able to determine the total number of watchlist screenings related to OAR and OAW.

<sup>17</sup> The approximately 3,300 encounters processed by TSOC included multiple encounters with some evacuees, particularly as individuals traveled to different locations resulting in multiple screenings of the same person.

<sup>18</sup> We did not evaluate encounter data after May 2023 as part of this audit.

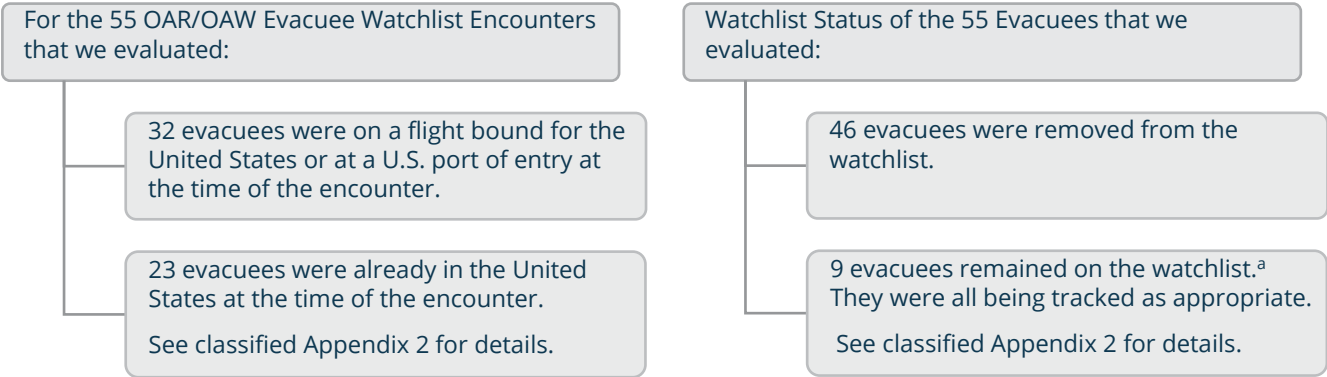
<sup>19</sup> TSOC's data indicated that 3 evacuees in addition to these 55 were in the United States at the time of the encounter. However, we obtained additional information from TSC showing that these three individuals never actually boarded flights bound for the United States.

<sup>20</sup> Twenty-nine of the 55 individuals were added to the watchlist after the start of OAR in July 2021. These individuals were added to the watchlist based on information that was either obtained as part of DHS's screening, vetting, and inspection process during the evacuation or added to the National Counterterrorism Center's Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment after the start of the evacuation. In some cases, this means the individual was paroled into the United States and then added to the watchlist.

<sup>21</sup> Our initial analysis included an additional five individuals who were encountered in the United States with inconclusive watchlist matches. As it relates to the TSC's efforts, we first evaluated these five individuals with inconclusive watchlist matches and ensured that TSOC followed the proper requirements for inconclusive results, which include asking the encountering agency to obtain additional information about the evacuee to attempt to make a conclusive determination. While all five encounters remained inconclusive due to a lack of information for the individual encountered, we found that TSOC's actions in relation to these five individuals was consistent with the requirements. None of the additional screening, vetting, and continuous identity discovery results that we reviewed indicated that these five individuals posed a risk to national security.

dates the individuals were added to and, if applicable, removed from the watchlist. We include detailed encounter and watchlist information for the 55 evacuees in an appendix prepared by the OIG (Appendix 2), which has been marked by the FBI as classified and Law Enforcement Sensitive and is therefore restricted from public release. The OIG has attached to this report an unclassified extract of Appendix 2 (Appendix 2 Extract) that the OIG created so that we could publicly release information in Appendix 2 that had not been marked as either classified or Law Enforcement Sensitive. The Appendix 2 Extract also identifies where in Appendix 2 the FBI determined that information is classified and Law Enforcement Sensitive. The Appendix 2 Extract is briefly summarized in Figure 3.

**Figure 3**  
**Encounter Information and Watchlist Status of the 55 Evacuees We Evaluated**



<sup>a</sup> As of July 25, 2024.

Source: OIG summary of information provided by the FBI

Next, we determined that TSOC immediately notified the screening agency of its final determination that the individual was indeed a match to the terrorist watchlist as required. Additionally, we determined that TSOU notified the appropriate components within the FBI, including CTD, of TSOC’s final determination as required. Regardless of DHS’s determinations for these individuals (including being admitted to, detained by, or refused entry to the United States) and whether they ultimately were removed from the watchlist, CTD conducted investigative work based on the investigative leads provided by TSOU in accordance with the FBI’s existing authorities as outlined in the FBI’s Domestic Investigations and Operations Guide. We discuss CTD’s actions in relation to all the individuals we evaluated in the Counterterrorism Division section of this report.

**Information Management Division: Vetting**

IMD’s Enterprise Vetting Center (EVC) OCONUS program—formerly operating as the FBI’s Foreign Terrorist Tracking Task Force—exploits intelligence to prevent travelers and their associates who pose a threat from entering the United States. For OAR and OAW, EVC utilized an automated vetting process that searched various U.S. government databases using the evacuees’ biographic identifiers provided by the FBI’s federal

partners to determine if there was known derogatory information associated with the Afghan evacuees.<sup>22</sup> During July 2021, the vetting requests were handled using existing vetting procedures; however, beginning in August 2021, due to the urgency of the evacuation after the fall of the Afghan government, the vetting processes were revised and vetting was conducted in two phases. During Phase One, DOD and CBP created lists of Afghan evacuees using flight manifests at the lily pads, or transit points, which were then consolidated and submitted to EVC by the National Counterterrorism Center via email with only a 2-hour window to respond. Individuals who cleared the manifest vetting were approved to board flights to travel to the United States. In Phase Two, DHS's National Vetting Center submitted re-vetting requests for OAR and OAW Afghan parolees already in the United States with the understanding that DHS included additional biographic identifiers not available during Phase One.<sup>23</sup>

According to IMD, EVC received most OAR and OAW vetting requests during Phase One from flight manifests submitted in August and September 2021.

Phase Two requests, with additional identifiers, were submitted between October 2021 and October 2022. The submissions included multiple submissions for some individuals and duplicate submissions with updates to one or more data fields for others. Altogether, EVC processed over 250,000 submissions throughout Phase One and Phase Two vetting.<sup>24</sup>

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCREENING AND VETTING

**Screening:** TSOC serves as the Nation's encounter management identity resolution focal point for all domestic and international encounters with potential known or reasonably suspected terrorists (i.e., subjects on the watchlist) by international, federal, state, local, territorial, or tribal agencies.

**Vetting:** EVC conducts vetting of visa applicants attempting to enter the United States. EVC utilizes various U.S. government databases to identify derogatory information, which is then provided to DOS, the department responsible for approving or denying visas.

**OAR and OAW:** For OAR and OAW, both EVC and TSOC used their existing processes, which were simultaneous and independent of one another, to evaluate Afghan evacuees. While EVC's vetting process is more expansive in that it identifies derogatory information in addition to the watchlist, both processes flagged individuals on the watchlist.

### Timeline of Events for OAR/OAW Vetting



Source: OIG summary of information from IMD

<sup>22</sup> The FBI will indicate existence of derogatory information in FBI's holdings when EVC identifies information that may constitute violations of Federal Criminal law or threats to national security.

<sup>23</sup> The National Vetting Center was established pursuant to Presidential Memorandum in 2018 with the purpose of coordinating agency vetting efforts to locate and use relevant intelligence and law enforcement information to identify individuals who may present a threat to the homeland.

<sup>24</sup> This count excludes any OAR vetting requests handled through EVC's vetting programs that existed prior to the inception of OAR. The number of vetting requests submitted to EVC was significantly higher than the number of encounters sent to TSOC for two reasons: (1) EVC processed all vetting requests, while TSOC only processed potential positive matches to the watchlist; and (2) Afghan parolees who remained in the United States were re-vetted, increasing the total number of vetting requests.

As noted above, EVC employed an automated vetting process that either indicated that an individual, their family members, or their U.S.-based contact's personally identifiable information was associated with derogatory information in FBI's holdings or did not yield a match to any derogatory information in FBI's holdings. If the automated process indicated no derogatory information, no further action was taken. If the automated process identified a potential match to FBI information, the information was reviewed by an FBI analyst, who in turn was responsible for making a reporting determination. Using the counts provided to us by IMD, we determined that approximately 99 percent of the EVC automated vetting results for OAR and OAW indicated no derogatory information in FBI's holdings. IMD reported a total of over 1,300 submissions resulting in a match to derogatory information (some individuals had more than one match). All results were then sent to the appropriate federal partner. Submissions resulting in a match to derogatory information were also sent to the appropriate FBI operational division or Field Office for awareness.

To determine whether IMD correctly vetted the 55 individuals we evaluated, we compared the evacuees' vetting results to their watchlist status at the time of the vetting request.<sup>25</sup> The purpose of the comparison was to determine if the vetting process identified derogatory information—in this instance, the individual's inclusion on the watchlist—as expected.<sup>26</sup> We found that for 15 individuals the automated portion of the vetting did not flag the individuals when they were on the watchlist during Phase One of the evacuation. This made it appear as though IMD returned a false negative vetting result. We reviewed each of these false vetting results with IMD. IMD staff explained that EVC's automated system requires a two-identifier (typically a name and date of birth) match with information in a U.S. government system to establish that an individual is potentially associated with derogatory information. With this in mind, we identified the reason for the lack of watchlist hits for these 15 evacuees was because the evacuation was an emergent event and federal partners submitted limited or incorrect biographic information not included in the U.S. government systems that EVC searches. As noted, however, we did confirm that for each of these 15 individuals, TSOU had notified the screening agency and CTD, as required by TSOU's Standard Operating Procedures, on account of their positive identification on the watchlist.

We cannot be certain that IMD's initial vetting efforts identified all potential derogatory information for all individuals vetted due to the unreliability of some of the biographic data provided to it by federal partner agencies, especially during the first phase of the evacuation. However, we believe the FBI's IMD-based automated vetting system operated as expected because the results were consistent with the limits set within the system due to the FBI's existing risk calculation for matching. We also found this issue only affected the initial vetting conducted during August through September 2021, or Phase One, timeframe. As noted previously, the National Vetting Center obtained additional identifiers, and when these evacuees were re-vetted in Phase Two, the system correctly identified them as having potential derogatory information. We ultimately determined that the concern created by incomplete information was offset by the sum of the FBI's efforts, including additional vetting during more recent parts of the operation and TSC's separate

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<sup>25</sup> The watchlist is constantly updated, meaning individuals can be removed from the list if new or updated information indicates that they no longer meet the criteria for inclusion. Many individuals we evaluated were removed from the watchlist during the evacuation. If an individual was not watchlisted on the date IMD vetted the individual, we would not expect the vetting system to return a red result for a watchlist-related reason.

<sup>26</sup> Derogatory information, including criminal threats, can come from sources other than the terrorist watchlist. We focused on the terrorist watchlist, because, as previously discussed in this report, we believe terrorism was the most significant threat associated with the evacuation and the watchlist is the most reliable indication that an individual is reasonably suspected of being associated with terrorism.

notification to CTD—through the encounter management process described above—indicating these individuals were watch listed. We also found that EVC notified its internal and external partners of its results as required.

Counterterrorism Division: Investigating

CTD’s International Terrorism Operations Section (ITOS) oversees the FBI’s international terrorism program. The FBI defines international terrorism as violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and groups who are inspired by, or associated with, designated foreign terrorist organizations or nations. For OAR and OAW, ITOS developed the Afghan Evacuee Working Group, operating from early in the evacuation into 2022, and then, the Afghan Critical Action Team, operating between February and November 2022, to investigate derogatory information, or leads, associated with Afghan evacuees. If during the vetting and screening processes, derogatory information indicated an Afghan evacuee had potential links to terrorism, ITOS was responsible for investigating the information to either mitigate or corroborate the threat. The leads came from many sources, including the TSC’s TSOU and IMD (as discussed above) as well as directly from various federal partners.<sup>27</sup>

ADDITIONAL WORK CONDUCTED BY CTD

At the start of OAW, CTD teams deployed to lily pads to assist DHS, DOD, and other federal partners with screening, vetting, and interviewing Afghan evacuees, many of whom had little to no documentation to substantiate information provided to the U.S. government. The rotating CTD teams were comprised of agents, analysts, and other professional employees. Additionally, CTD staffed analysts and operational specialists stateside who supported the teams by conducting database checks and assisting with related operational and intelligence work.

Timeline of Events for OAR/OAW Investigating



Source: OIG summary of information from CTD

Specifically, when a lead was received, ITOS, in coordination with the FBI Field Office closest to the physical location of an evacuee, was responsible for conducting investigative activities in accordance with the FBI’s Domestic Investigations and Operations Guide (DIOG). Under the DIOG, the FBI generally has four investigative options available to it depending on the evidence available at the time the lead is received: assessments, preliminary investigations, full investigations, and enterprise investigations. Each of these options has clearly defined investigative techniques available to it as well as different standards for opening and closing, including documentation and supervisory approval.<sup>28</sup> According to CTD staff, the FBI typically

<sup>27</sup> The specific number of OAR and OAW leads sent to CTD is classified. The 55 evacuees we discuss in this report only represent a fraction of the total number of investigative leads that CTD evaluated.

<sup>28</sup> These investigative activities are based on different evidentiary thresholds for opening. An assessment requires an authorized purpose and clearly defined objectives. A preliminary investigation requires any “allegation or information” indicative of possible criminal activity or threats to the national security. A full investigation is based on an “articulable factual basis” of possible criminal or national threat activity. An enterprise investigation is like a full investigation, but

Continued

started by conducting an assessment on evacuees referred to them, although all four investigative options were used at various points during OAR and OAW. Further, the DIOG allows the FBI to share information with other federal agencies if disclosure is compatible with the purpose for which the information was collected, and it is related to their responsibilities. According to CTD, both CTD and FBI Field Offices regularly communicated with DHS, including providing updates, requesting information, and coordinating efforts throughout the course of investigations related to evacuees.<sup>29</sup>

To better determine how the FBI handled evacuees with identified derogatory information, we asked CTD to provide information related to any investigative activity for the 55 individuals who were identified as being on the watchlist and we confirmed traveled to the United States. According to CTD, it had received referrals and conducted investigative work for all 55 evacuees. For these 55 individuals, we reviewed each case file to determine whether the evidence supporting the conclusion was included and that it underwent supervisory review. Overall, we found that the associated FBI Field Offices used various investigative tools, including assessments, preliminary investigations, and full investigations to address each of these 55 referrals and that most of the assessments and investigations we reviewed were closed. We also found evidence that the evacuee was removed from the watchlist based on the results of the investigation when appropriate. Next, we found that the subjects of open investigations remained on the watchlist and were monitored as appropriate. Finally, we found evidence that CTD notified its external partners of its investigative results when necessary. We include more detailed information related to CTD's investigative work for the 55 evacuees in an appendix prepared by the OIG (Appendix 2), which has been marked by the FBI as classified and Law Enforcement Sensitive and is therefore restricted from public release. This report contains an unclassified extract of Appendix 2 (Appendix 2 Extract), which is also briefly summarized above in Figure 3.

### **Criminal Justice Information Services: Continuous Identity Discovery**

CJIS's National Crime Information Center (NCIC) is a database consisting of 22 files containing real time criminal justice information, including records of persons who pose a threat to public safety. Criminal justice agencies at federal, state, local and tribal levels can enter records into the NCIC files, which, in turn, are accessible to law enforcement agencies nationwide. A law enforcement agency may conduct an inquiry of NCIC for various reasons ranging from a routine traffic stop or authorized background check to the investigation of a serious crime. If the inquiry determines the individual has a criminal record, the system responds instantly and requires the inquiring agency to contact the originating agency to verify the information is accurate and up to date prior to taking any actions. NCIC includes a Threat Screening Center File of known or suspected terrorists that is a subset of the terrorist watchlist maintained by the TSC. If a

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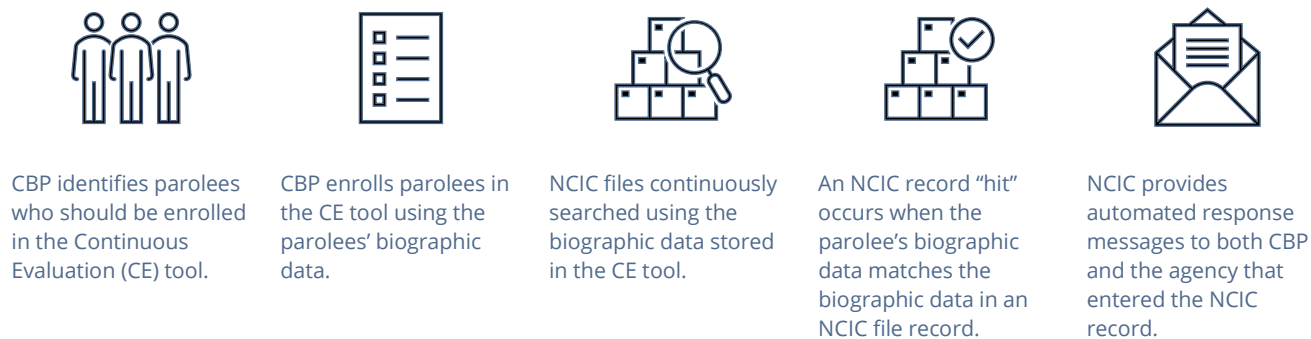
instead of targeting an individual it focuses on a group or organization that may be involved in the most serious criminal or national security threats to the public. An assessment may be converted to a preliminary or full investigation and a preliminary investigation can be converted to a full investigation if the standards outlined above are met. Each of these investigative activities can be closed for various reasons. For assessments, this includes no identified threat to national security. For preliminary and full investigations, this includes: (1) no further investigation is warranted because logical investigation and leads have been exhausted, and the investigation to date did not identify a criminal violation or a priority threat to the national security; (2) prosecution is declined; or (3) final prosecution.

<sup>29</sup> The numbers of opened, closed, and ongoing OAW and OAR assessments and investigations are classified.

criminal justice agency queries NCIC about an individual and there is a positive Threat Screening Center File response, meaning they are potentially a known or suspected terrorist, the agency is advised to contact TSC.

In June 2022, in support of OAR and OAW, CJIS signed a Letter of Intent (LOI) with CBP (to be amended or terminated after 2 years) which allows CBP to use CJIS's systems to provide automated records checks to support CBP in its larger efforts to conduct continuous vetting of Afghan parolees residing in the United States.<sup>30</sup> As part of this agreement, CJIS assisted CBP in enrolling parolees in the continuous evaluation process within NCIC to assist with CBP's ongoing evaluation of parolees to ensure they remain eligible for parole. Once CBP enrolls an individual in the tool, the system continuously checks to see if the individual has NCIC records, thereby allowing CBP to avoid making repeated inquiries of NCIC for a very large number of parolees for the duration of their parole. If a parolee "hits" on one or more NCIC file records as a result of new information being added to the database, including records in the Threat Screening Center File, NCIC provides an automated notification to both CBP and the agency that entered the record.<sup>31</sup> Enrolling individuals in the tool, and any subsequent updates or removals of the records, as well as confirming the hit with the agency that entered the NCIC record, are exclusively CBP's responsibility. The continuous evaluation process is summarized in Figure 4.

Figure 4  
Continuous Evaluation Tool



Source: LOI between CBP and CJIS

According to CJIS, CBP submitted over 97,300 enrollment records to the NCIC continuous evaluation tool between February 2022 and June 2023, with the large majority (85 percent) being enrolled in February 2022.<sup>32</sup> During that same period, NCIC reported that over 195,000 hit notifications were sent to

<sup>30</sup> According to CJIS's staff, as of July 2024, CBP requested to maintain the LOI, as there are parolees who entered the United States throughout 2022 and 2023, meaning their 2-year parolee period has not lapsed. CJIS indicated it will keep conducting continuous identity discovery and follow-up with CBP in accordance with the LOI.

<sup>31</sup> In addition to the Threat Screening Center File, CBP has access to the Wanted Person File, Missing Person File, Foreign Fugitive File, Immigration Violator File, Protection Order File, National Sex Offender Registry File, Supervised Release File, Identity Theft File, Gang File, Protective Interest File, NICS Denied Transaction File, and Violent Person File.

<sup>32</sup> NCIC staff explained that CBP submitted more than one enrollment for some parolees to account for possible variations in biographic data, such as name spellings.

CBP. This included multiple notifications for many of the enrollment records. It was CBP's responsibility to verify whether the identity in the NCIC record matched the individual within the enrolled population. Our review of some of these notifications to CBP made clear that not all hits were matches, as evidenced by differences between the biographic information included as part of the notification, such as name of the enrollee and the individual referenced in the NCIC record.

In addition to CJIS's management of NCIC, CJIS's Identity Management Unit (IMU) provides identity management services using Next Generation Identification (NGI) system, which according to CJIS provides the criminal justice community with one of the world's largest and most efficient electronic repository of biometric and criminal history information. According to the FBI, NGI is interoperable with DHS's Automated Biometric Identification System (IDENT) and DOD's Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS) to enable the rapid sharing of biometric identification data, as well as related biographic, criminal history, national security, immigration, and military force protections information. For OAR and OAW, the same LOI that allowed for the creation of the NCIC continuous evaluation tool allows CBP to enter Afghan parolees' fingerprint records into NGI to provide continuous identity discovery. The LOI states that IMU is responsible for identifying "matches" if derogatory information is found based on a match to NGI's, DOD's, and DHS's biometric systems, NCIC, or other databases. Derogatory information may include but is not limited to arrests, encounters, detention by military forces outside of the United States, and being added to a watch list. IMU is required to notify CBP of all matches of Afghan evacuees through an electronic submission. According to IMU, it ingested just over 49,200 fingerprint records between July and August 2022 for Afghan evacuees who were paroled into the United States. NGI staff explained that these were unique records for Afghan parolees between 12 and 79 years old. Between September 2022 and June 2023, IMU reported a total of 248 criminal notifications, 17 of which related to threats to national security (specifically watchlist matches), which we discuss in further detail below. We ensured these notifications were sent to CBP, as required by the LOI.

**ADDITIONAL WORK CONDUCTED BY CJIS**

CJIS's Global Initiatives Unit (GIU) combats terrorism, improves law enforcement effectiveness, and promotes public safety through the collection and global exchange of biometric and identity data. At the start of OAW, GIU assisted CBP at the lily pads and ports of entry at U.S. airports. According to GIU staff, they captured fingerprints; ingested biometric data into DOD's, DHS's, and FBI's biometric systems; and assisted with follow-up inspections based on the results from the three systems.

Prior to the LOI, IMU was responsible for managing a very large volume of requests from DHS to screen individuals on NGI using biometric data that was collected in the early part of the evacuation, including fingerprints, from the evacuees. This was in addition to screening using DHS's Automated Biometric Identification System (IDENT) and DOD's Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS). The purpose of these queries was to determine if there was any derogatory information associated with the evacuees.

**Timeline of Events for OAR/OAW Continuous Identity Discovery**



Source: OIG summary of information from CJIS

For the 55 individuals we evaluated, we reviewed NCIC enrollments and notifications to determine if the continuous evaluation tool correctly identified hits on NCIC record files. We also reviewed NGI enrollments

and matches to determine if NGI's biometric matches were either reflected in CTD's investigative work or otherwise communicated to CBP. Not every one of the 55 evacuees was enrolled in NCIC or NGI. While enrollment decisions were made by CBP and are therefore outside of the scope of our audit, one possible reason for exclusion is that the individual was no longer in the United States. Our results relate to those individuals for which we had NCIC and NGI records. Similar to IMD vetting, the purpose of our analysis was to determine if NCIC identified derogatory information—in this instance, the individual's inclusion in the Threat Screening Center File—as expected. We did not identify any issues related to NCIC's continuous evaluation results. We also did not identify any instances of individuals we evaluated being matched to an NCIC file record other than the Threat Screening Center File.

For NGI, the purpose of this analysis was to ensure that the FBI was aware of the individuals' association with potential derogatory information contained within the biometric systems managed by the FBI, DHS, and DOD. An example would be a fingerprint match with DOD's Biometrically Enabled Watchlist, which is an intelligence product created when biometrics are matched to persons of interest to DOD including known or suspected terrorists. In all instances where an individual we evaluated had potential derogatory information included as part of NGI, CTD's investigative work accounted for that information. We also determined that CJIS notified its external partners of matches resulting from NGI's continuous discovery tool, as required.

#### ***FBI's More Recent Continuous Identity Discovery of Afghan Parolees***

In addition to evaluating the FBI's actions in relation to the 55 Afghan evacuees discussed throughout this report, we expanded our evaluation to include Afghan evacuees who were identified as potential national security threats through CJIS's more recent continuous identity discovery. The purpose of this evaluation was to ensure that the U.S. government's larger screening and vetting efforts, and specifically the FBI's role in those efforts, continue to identify and address any previously unknown or new risks associated with parolees who now reside in the United States.

The NGI data that we collected as part of CJIS's automated records checks through June of 2023 included 17 NGI notifications related to biometric enrollments on the terrorist watchlist. CJIS explained that this type of enrollment indicates that the TSC notified CJIS that an Afghan parolee's fingerprints have been added to a new or existing watchlist record. We then expanded our analysis another 6 months to include all biometric enrollments on the terrorist watchlist through December 2023. This expanded analysis led to the identification of a total of 27 fingerprint records for Afghan parolees being added to new or existing terrorist watchlist records. Because these individuals were presumably already paroled into the United States, we asked the FBI what actions were taken in relation to these individuals as the FBI became aware of them.

According to the Threat Screening Operations Center (TSOC), 8 of the 27 individuals were subsequently removed from the watchlist, meaning no additional actions were required by the FBI. However, we confirmed that the other 19 parolees were still watchlisted as of March 2024 and that 15 of these individuals were encountered by various agencies after TSC's initial notification to CJIS. We further confirmed that each of the encounters for these 15 parolees were referred to TSOC as required and then sent to CTD or other relevant FBI units. Therefore, each of these encounters were handled in accordance with the FBI's existing process for mitigating or corroborating potential threats. We also found that all 15 individuals were the subjects of previous or existing investigative work related to the evacuation and resettlement, indicating that continuous identity discovery was not the only process by which these threats were flagged. Lastly, we

confirmed that the remaining four individuals were not encountered after the initial notification of the watchlist status by TSC to CJIS. However, for these four individuals we confirmed that the FBI was aware of the threat and responded appropriately. Therefore, we believe the FBI's handling of these 27 parolees was appropriate and consistent with established protocols.

## **FBI Coordination with its Federal Partners**

As detailed throughout this report, we found that throughout OAR and OAW the FBI and its federal partners frequently coordinated with one another to identify and track Afghan evacuees who may pose national security threats to the United States. For each of the 55 evacuees we evaluated we found documented evidence that confirmed the TSC, IMD, CTD, and CJIS communicated the results of their work with the necessary federal partners. To gain additional insight into the efficacy of the FBI's coordination with its federal partners, we also obtained feedback from staff from several agencies that worked with the FBI as part of OAR and OAW. This included DOD; various DHS agencies, including CBP, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services; and the National Counterterrorism Center. Overall, based on the responses provided by representatives from each of these federal partners, we did not identify any significant concerns regarding the FBI's communication and coordination efforts.



## Conclusion

Effective coordination among the FBI and its federal partners is vital to ensure that those who would threaten our national security are prevented from gaining access to our country. We found that the FBI's processes helping support these critical decisions during OAR and OAW were generally effective and appropriate, especially given the urgency of the situation after the immediate fall of the Afghan government on August 15, 2021. As noted throughout this report, we based our conclusions on an in-depth evaluation of the FBI's actions for a subset of evacuees who were on the terrorist watchlist and traveled to the United States as part of the evacuation. In our judgment, these individuals potentially posed the greatest risk to national security at the time of the evacuation and as parolees resettled in the United States. In each instance we found that the FBI's screening, vetting, investigative, and continuous identity discovery efforts revealed potential threats that existed and appropriate mitigation steps were taken in response to those threats. Although we do not offer any specific recommendations to the FBI in this report related to its efforts to support OAR and OAW, we urge the FBI to continue to evaluate and streamline its screening and vetting processes so it is in the best position possible to respond to future emergencies.

## **APPENDIX 1: Objective, Scope, and Methodology**

### **Objective**

The objective was to assess the effectiveness of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) coordination with its federal partners to support Operation Allies Refuge (OAR) and Operation Allies Welcome (OAW).

### **Scope and Methodology**

Generally, the scope of our audit was the start of OAR in July 2021 through September 2023 and included all FBI activity—screening, vetting, investigating, and continuous identity discovery—related to OAR and OAW. To accomplish our objective, we evaluated information from four FBI groups: the Terrorist Screening Center (TSC) Operations Branch, the Information Management Division (IMD), the Counterterrorism Division (CTD), and the Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Division. This included interviewing several officials from each of the four groups, the majority of whom were directly involved with OAR and OAW. We assessed whether each of these groups complied with agency policies and procedures, including TSOC Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), Foreign Threat Tracking Task Force (FTTTF) Visa Vetting Unit SOP, the FBI's Domestic Investigations and Operations Guide, and the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) Operating Manual. We also evaluated the groups' activity for OAR and OAW using OAR and OAW-specific guidance, including FTTTF Afghan Vetting Process for Shift Operators, the Letter of Intent (LOI) between Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and CJIS regarding CBP's activities relating to OAW, and a TSC Addendum to the LOI. We collected and analyzed various data sets related to OAR and OAW, including the encounters submitted to TSOC, the vetting requests submitted to IMD, NCIC enrollments and notifications, and records ingested in Next Generation Identification.

We evaluated the FBI's specific actions related to 55 Afghan evacuees to determine whether they were screened, vetted, investigated, and subject to continuous identity discovery in accordance with applicable guidance. Our work included identifying the records associated with each evacuee, including comparing results among the various data sets; obtaining or reviewing supporting documentation, including encounter tracking sheets and Operations Logs from TSC, biographic information within U.S. government databases accessed through IMD, investigative case files in SENTINEL, the FBI's case management system, from CTD, and identification records from CJIS; and obtaining explanations for actions related to specific evacuees from various subject matter experts across each of the four groups. We also determined, for each evacuee, whether each group notified its FBI counterparts and partners as applicable. Additionally, we judgmentally selected smaller samples of evacuees to ensure that specific parts of the process were functioning as intended. This included verifying whether TSOC notified the appropriate parties of inconclusive matches to the watchlist. Next, we also evaluated the FBI's specific actions related to 27 Afghan parolees, only one of whom was part of the 55 evacuees we previously evaluated, who were identified as being watchlisted in NGI from December 2022 through December 2023. For all our analysis related to watchlist statuses, once we confirmed an individual was removed from the watchlist, we did not seek to determine whether the individual was added back to the watchlist at a later date.

Finally, we sought the views of the FBI's numerous federal partners to understand their experiences working with the FBI during OAR and OAW. We asked the FBI to provide points of contact. We expanded our outreach to include additional points of contact provided by the federal partners. We reached out to DOD;

various DHS agencies, including CBP, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services; and the National Counterterrorism Center.

As noted in the body of this report, we provided the FBI an official draft copy of this report for review and comment. Because our draft report did not contain any formal recommendations to the FBI, the FBI opted to not provide an official response. Nevertheless, as stated above, we sought the views of responsible FBI officials and other federal partners throughout the audit engagement. Their views are captured throughout this report, as appropriate.

## **Statement on Compliance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards**

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards (GAGAS). Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective.

## **Internal Controls**

In this audit, we performed testing of internal controls significant within the context of our audit objective. We did not evaluate the internal controls of the FBI to provide assurance on its internal control structure as a whole. The FBI's management is responsible for the establishment and maintenance of internal controls in accordance with OMB Circular A-123. Because we do not express an opinion on the FBI's internal control structure as a whole, we offer this statement solely for the information and use of the FBI.<sup>33</sup>

The scope of our work on internal controls largely included evaluating two internal control principles. For control activities, we obtained an understanding of the operations, including information systems and policies, of TSC, IMD, CTD, and CJIS, with a particular focus on their actions in relation to OAR and OAW. For information and communication, we evaluated the quality of information that the FBI used and produced, as well as whether TSC, IMD, CTD, and CJIS communicated with their FBI counterparts and federal partners. We were able to evaluate the operating effectiveness of these controls using our sample-based testing.

We did not identify any internal control deficiencies, as discussed in the Audit Results section of this report. However, because our review was limited to those internal control components and underlying principles that we found significant to the objective of this audit, it may not have disclosed all internal control deficiencies that may have existed at the time of this audit.

## **Sample-Based Testing**

To accomplish our audit objective, we performed sample-based testing for TSC's, IMD's, CTD's, and CJIS's actions in relation to 55 Afghan evacuees from the approximately 3,300 OAR and OAW encounters that were

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<sup>33</sup> This restriction is not intended to limit the distribution of this report, which is a matter of public record. However, because this report contains sensitive information that must be appropriately controlled, a redacted copy of this report with sensitive information removed will be made available publicly.

submitted to TSOC between July 2021 and May 2023. These individuals, in our judgment, posed the greatest potential risk to national security at the time of the evacuation. In this effort, we employed a judgmental sampling design to obtain broad exposure to numerous facets of the areas we reviewed. This non-statistical sample design did not allow projection of the test results to the universe from which the samples were selected.

### **Computer-Processed Data**

During our audit, we obtained information from TSC's Terrorist Screening System, IMD's vetting management system, CJIS's NCIC, and CJIS's NCI. We assessed the reliability of these data by (1) interviewing FBI officials knowledgeable about the data, (2) performing electronic testing of required data elements, and (3) verifying whether a sample of records matched the supporting documentation related to these systems. We determined that the data was sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report. We also relied on data from SENTINEL, FBI's case management system. We did not test the reliability of this system as a whole; therefore, the information from this system was verified with supporting documentation.

## APPENDIX 2 EXTRACT: Encounter, Watchlist, and Investigative Information for the Evaluated Evacuees

[We issued to the FBI and the Department of Justice the full version of Appendix 2, which the FBI determined contains information that is classified and Law Enforcement Sensitive. The OIG created this extract of Appendix 2, so that we could publicly release information in Appendix 2 that had not been marked by the FBI as either classified or Law Enforcement Sensitive. In addition, this Appendix 2 Extract identifies where in Appendix 2 the FBI determined that information is classified and Law Enforcement Sensitive.]

### Summary of Watchlist Encounters Based on when the Evacuees were Added to the Watchlist<sup>34</sup>

26 evacuees were added to the watchlist prior to the start of OAR in July 2021.

- 24 evacuees were encountered prior to entering the United States on an inbound flight or at a U.S. Port of Entry.
- [Redacted]

29 evacuees were added to the watchlist after the start of OAR in July 2021.

- Eight evacuees were encountered prior to entering the United States on an inbound flight or at a U.S. Port of Entry.
- 21 evacuees were in the United States at the time of encounter. These evacuees were added to the watchlist after they entered the United States.

### Summary of Investigative Activity

	Open as of July 2024 <sup>a</sup>	Closed
Assessments	0	31
Preliminary Investigations	0	4
Full Investigations	4	7
Other Activities: Six evacuees were relatives of the main subject of an assessment or investigation. For three evacuees, the FBI completed investigative work other than assessments and investigations (e.g., reviewing leads).		

<sup>a</sup> As of July 2024, one of the four open investigations was in the process of being closed (all baseline collection and logical investigative steps were completed and CTD concurred with the case closure) pending the completion of administrative items.

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<sup>34</sup> [Redacted]

## Summary of Evacuees who Remained on the Watchlist

Nine evacuees remained on the watchlist as of July 2024.

- Four evacuees were the subjects of open investigations (one of which was in the process of closing).
- One evacuee was not in the United States.
- Four evacuees remained on the watchlist based on a known association with known or suspected terrorists.

For the 46 evacuees who were removed from the watchlist, there were a number of reasons for removal including the nominating agency recalling the derogatory information, a recommendation based on the FBI's investigative work, or an error was identified.

## Details for Each Evacuee

[Redacted]