

U.S. Sen. Johnson: Cotton, Ernst demand answers from DHS how former al-Qaeda leader became U.S. citizen

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Ron Johnson (R-Wisc.), Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) and Joni Ernst (R-Iowa) sent a letter to Department of Homeland Security Acting Secretary Chad Wolf Thursday demanding answers to how a former al-Qaeda leader was allowed to emigrate to the United States as a refugee and become a citizen. Ali Yousef Ahmed Al-Nouri was recently arrested in Arizona after the Iraqi government sought to have him extradited based on charges of premeditated murder committed in 2006 in Al-Fallujah, Iraq. News reports have stated that Al-Nouri became an American citizen two years ago.

“If these reports are accurate, we are concerned that our vetting processes did not identify a former leader of al-Qaeda either when he entered the country as a refugee or when sought and obtained U.S. citizenship,” the senators wrote.

Senator Johnson is the chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. Full [text of the letter](#) is below.

February 20, 2020

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf

Acting Secretary

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

246 Murray Lane, SW

Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf:

On Friday, January 31, 2020, the Department of Justice announced the arrest in Arizona of Ali Yousef Ahmed Al-Nouri, an alleged former leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq.[1] The Government of Iraq requested Al-Nouri's arrest and extradition based on charges of premeditated murder committed in 2006 in Al-Fallujah, Iraq. According to press reports, Al-Nouri entered the United States in 2008 as a refugee and became a U.S. citizen two years ago.[2] If these reports are accurate, we are concerned that our vetting processes did not identify a former leader of al-Qaeda either when he entered the country as a refugee or when sought and obtained U.S. citizenship.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) plays a critical role in screening visa applications and vetting all immigrants seeking to enter the U.S. To better understand Al-Nouri's presence in the U.S. and his pending extradition, please provide the following records and information:

1. The visa category pursuant to which Al-Nouri was admitted to the U.S., the port of entry where Al-Nouri was admitted, and the date of admission.
2. Did any DHS Visa Security Unit personnel review his application? If so, please identify the location of the DHS personnel that conducted the review, whether the review included social media vetting, and whether DHS was aware of Al-Nouri's affiliation with Al-Qaeda.
3. A description of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' vetting and adjudication of Al-Nouri's residency and/or naturalization petition to the U.S.
4. The information that the Government of Iraq provided to the U.S. Government in connection with the Iraqi government's extradition request.

Please produce this material as soon as possible, but by no later than 5:00 p.m. on Friday, March 6, 2020. To the maximum extent possible, please provide unclassified responses to these questions. Any classified information provided in response to this letter should be provided under separate cover through the Office of Senate Security. In addition, we request that appropriate DHS staff arrange a briefing with our staff on this matter. Please arrange this briefing by March 13, 2020.

The Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs is authorized by Rule XXV of the Standing Rules of the Senate to investigate “the efficiency, economy, and effectiveness of all agencies and departments of the Government.”[3] Additionally, Senate Resolution 70 (116th Congress) authorizes the Committee to examine “the efficiency and economy of operations of all branches the Government.”[4]