

# Judicial Watch: Homeland Security Records Reveal Officials Ordered Terrorist Watch List Scrubbed

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## ***FOIA Lawsuit for Terrorist “Hands Off” List Shows Almost 1,000 Individuals Removed from Terror Watch List***

(Washington, DC) – Judicial Watch announced today that it obtained **183 pages** of documents from the Department of Homeland Security revealing that the Obama administration scrubbed the law enforcement agency’s “Terrorist Screening Database” in order to protect what it considered the civil rights of suspected Islamic terrorist groups. The documents appear to confirm charges that Obama administration changes created a massive “hands off” list. Removed data from the terrorist watch list could have helped prevent the San Bernardino terrorist attack.

The new documents were produced in response to Judicial Watch’s Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) lawsuit filed on February 13, 2015, (***Judicial Watch v U.S. Department of Homeland Security*** (No. 1:15-cv-00222)) for:

1. A copy of the [Department of Homeland Security] Office of Inspector General report regarding, concerning, or related to a “hands off list” purportedly maintained by [Department of Homeland Security], US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and/or US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) used to allow certain individuals to enter the United States, who had previously been denied entry to the United States or been made to undergo secondary screening by CBP based on suspicion of terrorism ties.
2. Any and all records of communication to or from [Department of Homeland Security] Inspector General Charles Edwards from May 31, 2014 regarding the aforementioned OIG report.

On May 6, 2014, Senator Charles Grassley (R-IA) released **internal Department of**

**Homeland Security emails** revealing an alleged terrorist “hands off” list allowing individuals with potential terrorist ties into the United States. Allegations by former Customs and Border Patrol Officer Philip Haney spurred Senator Grassley’s and other congressional investigations.

The new Homeland Security documents confirm the modification of nearly 1,000 terrorist suspect reports. The September 25, 2013, Department of Homeland Security Inspector General **memorandum** regarding Haney’s terror watch list entries, discloses that the Department of Homeland Security Privacy Office and Department of Homeland Security Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties “determined that individuals could only be “‘watchlisted’ based on an association with a known or suspected terrorist already ‘watchlisted’... not based on their affiliation with [REDACTED] (or any other [REDACTED] organization.” The redactions are under Exemption 7 (E), which the government asserts in this instance:

Protects all law enforcement information that “would disclose techniques and procedures for law enforcement investigation or prosecution, or would disclose guidelines for law enforcement investigations or prosecution if such disclosure could reasonably be expected to risk circumvention of the law.” 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(7)(E). DHS-OIG is withholding from disclosure specific information pertaining to a terrorist watch list which could reasonably be expected to risk circumvention of the law.”

The Homeland Security **Inspector General’s report**, released only as a result of the Judicial Watch lawsuit, shows that a Homeland Security official reported that Haney was forced to “modify” nearly a thousand terror suspect entries:

“In order to be in compliance with CBP [Customs and Border Protection] policy, [Redacted] was ordered by [Redacted] supervisors to modify all 820 records and remove all references to terrorism.”

The documents include a June 8, 2012, **letter of commendation** to Haney by a senior official with Homeland Security’s National Targeting Center who describes Haney as “invaluable” and commends him for assisting “in the identification of over 300 persons with possible connections to terrorism.”

Senator Grassley **previously released emails** including a 2012 email chain between Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection asking whether to admit an unnamed individual with ties to various terrorist groups. The person was believed to be a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and a close associate and supporter of Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, according to the email exchange obtained by Grassley’s

office.

In his February 3, 2014, [letter to Johnson](#), Grassley quotes an email from an Immigration and Customs Enforcement official to a Customs and Border Protection official saying, “I’m puzzled how someone could be a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and unindicted co-conspirator in the Holy Land Foundation trial, be an associate of [Redacted], say that the US is staging car bombings in Iraq and that [it] is ok for men to beat their wives, question who was behind the 9/11 attacks, and be afforded the luxury of a visitor visa and de-watchlisted.”

On May 19, 2014, Chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee Mike McCaul (R-TX) told [Breitbart News](#) that the “terrorist hands off list” emails released by Grassley had been under investigation by the newly appointed Department of Homeland Security Inspector General John Roth for over three months. McCaul added, “The new IG has inherited this matter. He’s a new IG. He’s pretty decent—well respected. Obviously, his predecessor was not.”

Roth’s predecessor was Charles Edwards, who left office after a series of allegations that he had [softened reports](#) to avoid embarrassing the Obama administration. According to an April 24, 2014, report from an oversight panel of the [Senate Homeland Security and Government Operations Committee](#), Edwards “failed to uphold the independence of the OIG ... and directed that reports be altered or delayed to accommodate senior Department of Homeland Security officials.”

“These new documents bolster allegations that the Obama administration may have removed information from a terrorist watch list that could have prevented the San Bernardino terrorist attack,” said Judicial Watch President Tom Fitton. “Philip Haney risked his career to blow the whistle on how the Obama administration created a ‘hands off’ list of over 1,000 foreign nationals with potential terrorist ties. And, once again, it was a Judicial Watch lawsuit – and not Congress or the media – that uncovered the key information about this national security scandal.”

Haney told [Breitbart.com](#) after the San Bernardino terrorist attack that entries regarding suspicious and [terror-related activity](#) were removed from an agency watch list as the result of political pressure after the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing:

“They came into the National Targeting Center, either physically or through emails and correspondence, and said that we could not develop cases based on association with Tablighi Jamaat [a Muslim religious organization with which the San Bernardino terrorists were reportedly affiliated], and/or any Islamic group,” Haney revealed.

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Haney said his superiors actually erased some of his files pertinent to the case, because they insisted the initiative had “gone in a different direction” and he was no longer authorized to add his data.

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