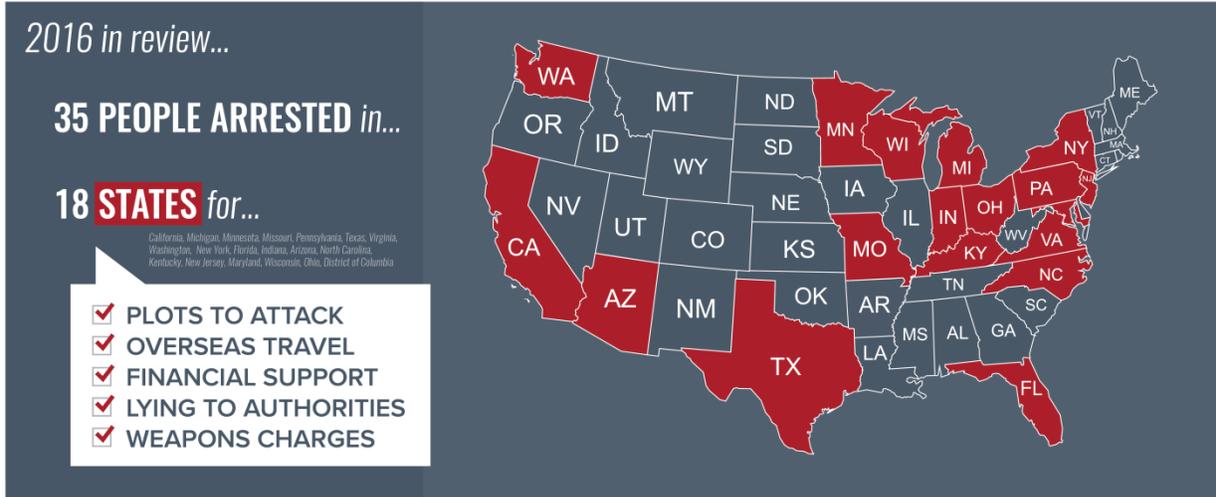




THE ISIS TERROR THREAT IN AMERICA



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KEY POINTS

- ◆ The United States faces its highest Islamist terror threat environment since 9/11, and much of the threat now stems from individuals who have been radicalized at home. Since 9/11, the nation has seen 227 homegrown jihadist cases with a recent surge of 115 cases in 2015 and 2016 alone. ISIS' shift in messaging—from joining the jihad in Syria and Iraq to carrying out attacks in fighters' home countries—is likely to accelerate this trend.
- ◆ ISIS continued to wreak havoc against Western targets in 2016. Throughout the year, ISIS conducted 62 attacks, wounding 732 and killing 215 in places like the United States, France, and Belgium.¹ The threat to Europe and the United States will persist in 2017, particularly as jihadists flee from Mosul and Raqqa. Terror groups will also continue to rely on refugee programs, porous borders, and well-known migration routes to gain access to various countries throughout the West.
- ◆ The Iran nuclear deal—coupled with instability in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen—has reenergized Tehran's hardliners and placed the regime in a stronger position to achieve regional hegemony. Iranian aggression, particularly in the Persian Gulf, has become routine and remains largely unopposed. If left unchecked, Tehran will continue to threaten United States' interests at home and abroad.
- ◆ The Obama Administration transferred 48 prisoners from Guantanamo Bay in 2016. The Director of National Intelligence assesses that at least 30 percent of all former Guantanamo Bay prisoners are known or suspected to have returned to terrorism following their release. As of early December 2016, 59 prisoners remain in detention.

HOMEGROWN ISLAMIST EXTREMISM

Recent Developments:

- ◆ November 28: Abdul Razak Ali Artan, an 18-year-old Somali refugee, drove a vehicle into a group of pedestrians on The Ohio State University's campus and proceeded to stab individuals with a butcher knife. In a post on his Facebook page, Artan cited Al Qaeda cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, referenced "lone wolf attacks" and stated, "America! Stop interfering with other countries, especially Muslim Ummah [community]. We are not weak. We are not weak, remember that." Within minutes of the attack Artan was shot dead by a police officer.
- ◆ November 19: Mohamed Rafik Naji, 37-year-old legal permanent resident from New York, was arrested for attempting to join ISIS. He had previously traveled to Turkey and Yemen in 2015. While in Yemen, Naji attempted to travel to ISIS-controlled territories and returned to the U.S. in September 2015. During a conversation with an FBI informant, Naji expressed his support for an ISIS attack—similar to the ISIS attack in Nice last summer—in Times Square.

¹ This figure is based on open-source data compiled and analyzed by the Majority Staff of the Homeland Security Committee.



- ◆ November 7: Aaron Travis Daniels, a 20-year-old U.S. citizen from Ohio, was arrested after attempting to travel to Libya to join ISIS. Daniels planned to fly from the United States to Trinidad and then on to Libya. He had expressed his support for ISIS through social media and sent money to an ISIS operative overseas.

A Look at Homegrown Islamist Extremism

- ◆ Since September 11, 2001, there have been at least 227 homegrown jihadist plots in the United States, including attempts to join terrorist groups overseas and execute attacks at home. More than 90 percent of these cases have occurred or been uncovered since 2009.²
- ◆ Authorities have arrested 115 individuals in the U.S. and charged 4 others in absentia in ISIS-linked cases since 2014.³
- ◆ These individuals had, among other acts: plotted attacks, attempted to join ISIS in Iraq and Syria (or facilitated others' travel), provided money, equipment, and weapons to ISIS, and falsified statements to federal authorities.

ISIS TERROR PLOTS AGAINST THE WEST

There have been at least 131 ISIS-linked plots to attack Western targets since 2014. This figure includes 40 ISIS-linked plots inside the United States.⁴

Recent Developments

- ◆ November 29: A German intelligence officer was arrested for a suspected plot against Germany's domestic security agency. He is thought to have pledged allegiance to the Austrian leader of ISIS and passed along sensitive information about the agency in internet chatrooms.
- ◆ November 19-20: France foiled a militant plot, arresting seven people in Marseille and Strasbourg on November 19 and 20. The attack was arranged to simultaneously target landmarks in and around Paris. The plotters were a mix of French, Moroccan and Afghan citizens, unknown to French authorities prior to the investigation.
- ◆ November 4 & 15: Local law enforcement authorities arrested 18 suspects in Kosovo and six more in Albania and Macedonia in connection with a potential terrorist cell. Lavdrim Muhaxheri, an ISIS member and self-declared "commander of Albanians in Syria and Iraq", allegedly was in contact with the cell and directed its members to carry out attacks. The cell planned to target a World Cup qualifying match between Israel and Albania on November 12.
- ◆ November 3: German authorities arrested a 27-year-old Syrian believed to be planning an attack on behalf of ISIS. The man was seeking asylum in Germany and had received guidance from an ISIS operative in Syria.

² This figure is based on open-source data compiled by the Congressional Research Service and the Majority Staff of the Homeland Security Committee.

³ This figure is based on open-source data compiled and analyzed by the Majority Staff of the Homeland Security Committee.

⁴ These figures are based on open-source data compiled and analyzed by the Majority Staff of the Homeland Security Committee.



FOREIGN FIGHTERS

A Look at Foreign Fighters

- ◆ More than 40,000 fighters—including at least 7,900 from Western countries—have reportedly traveled to Syria and Iraq from at least 120 countries since 2011.
- ◆ As many as 20,000 Shia fighters—including from Lebanese Hezbollah and Iranian-directed Iraq-based militias— have also traveled to Syria to fight alongside the Assad regime.
- ◆ Europol estimates that nearly 2,000 European fighters have returned home from Syria and Iraq.
- ◆ According to EU Commissioner for the Security Union Julian King, an influx of jihadists to Europe is possible as the battle to capture Mosul from the Islamic state continues. “The retaking of the IS’s northern Iraq territory, Mosul, may lead to the return to Europe of violent IS fighters,” King said. “This is a very serious threat and we must be prepared to face it.”

Refugee Programs Pose Risks

- ◆ The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) has identified “...individuals with ties to terrorist groups in Syria attempting to gain entry to the U.S. through the U.S. refugee program.” The Obama administration has resettled nearly 13,000 Syrian refugees in the United States this past fiscal year. American law enforcement and intelligence officials have repeatedly indicated that the U.S. lacks reliable and credible intelligence to properly vet and screen potential Syrian refugees. Other refugee programs in the U.S. also pose a risk, a Somali refugee that injured 11. Since 9/11,
- ◆ Yet the diligent vetting of all refugee populations is essential, as demonstrated by the recent ISIS-inspired attack on OSU’s campus by Abdul Razak Ali Artan a Somali refugee that injured 11. Between 9/11 and the end of October 2016, there have been 99,726 Somali refugees admitted into the United States and 9,020 admitted in 2016. Almost 5,500 Somali refugees are scheduled to enter the U.S. in 2017, mostly from the Kenyan cities of Al Dadaab and Kakuma. A number of Al Shabaab fighters are based out of Al Dabaab.
- ◆ In Europe, an estimated 36 militants posing as migrants have been arrested or died while either planning or carrying out acts of terrorism.
- ◆ Investigators in early November identified the suspected coordinator of the November 2015 Paris and March 2016 Brussels terror attacks as Oussama Atar, a dual Belgian and Moroccan national. As of early December, Atar remains at large.
- ◆ At least two ISIS suicide bombers in the November 2015 Paris attack that left 130 dead and hundreds wounded infiltrated Europe through Hungary’s borders, carrying fake passports and posing as Syrian refugees. Two others traveling with the Paris attackers eventually reached Salzburg, Austria where they applied for asylum and planned another attack. They were arrested in December of 2015.
- ◆ A man suspected of purchasing the suitcases that were used in the March 2016 Brussels attacks that killed 32 was charged for his involvement in the Paris attacks months before. He is believed to have arrived in Europe via the refugee route through the Greek Island of Leros.



- ◆ Jaber Albakr, a Syrian refugee that came to Germany seeking asylum, was arrested in October 2016 on suspicion of planning a bomb attack at a Berlin airport two days after escaping a raid on his apartment that contained explosives. Days later, Albakr committed suicide in his cell in Leipzig, Germany.
- ◆ A Syrian refugee living in a shelter in Germany who had reportedly been “rapidly radicalized” was arrested after plotting an attack on behalf of ISIS.
- ◆ A suicide bomber living in Germany had reportedly sought asylum in Europe after illegally entering the continent from Syria in 2013. He detonated an explosive device outside of a music festival in Ansbach.
- ◆ At least one of the European ISIS operatives in the March 2016 Brussels attack reportedly re-entered Europe by posing as a Syrian refugee in Greece.

FOREIGN JIHADIST NETWORKS & SAFE HAVENS

ISIS ABROAD: UPDATES

At least 34 Islamist extremist groups have pledged their allegiance to ISIS and the group has established eight official branches. ISIS, its affiliates, and supporting groups have operated in approximately two dozen countries or territories, including Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Brazil, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Lebanon, Nigeria, the Palestinian territories (Gaza), Pakistan, Philippines, Russia (North Caucasus region), Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen.⁵

Due to counterterrorism pressure, ISIS has lost significant territory in Iraq and Syria. In 2015, the Islamic State suffered a net loss of 14 percent of its so-called “caliphate.” Throughout the first nine months of 2016, ISIS’ territory shrunk by an additional 12 percent. National Security Advisor Susan Rice recently stated that approximately 55 percent of the territory taken by ISIS in 2014 had been recovered by Iraqi Security Forces.

In early December, ISIS announced the successor of Abu Muhammad Al-Adnani, the deceased “principal architect” of ISIS’s external operations killed by U.S. airstrike in August 2016. A speech by the new spokesman, Abu Hassan al-Muhajir, was released calling for attacks on Turkey and “all over the world.”

ISIS in Iraq & Syria

Update on Mosul

- ◆ In October 2016, the Iraqi Government launched an operation to retake Mosul, ISIS’ last remaining stronghold in Iraq and the largest city under the group’s control. The operation is backed by U.S. airstrikes and ground support and consists of both Iraqi regular troops and Special Forces, Kurdish Peshmerga fighters and Shia militias. Recent reports indicate that around 1,000 ISIS militants have been killed in the battle for Mosul. Nearly half of the city has been retaken, and the advance continues to progress.

⁵ Data compiled by the Majority Staff of the Homeland Security Committee using open source materials.



Update on Raqqa

- ◆ In early November 2016, Operation Euphrates Rage was launched by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) with the support of the United States and an international coalition to liberate Raqqa. Thus far, the SDF has liberated over 321 square kilometers. Coalition strikes have also removed key leaders from the battlefield, such as Abd al-Basit al-Iraqi, the emir of ISIS' Middle East external networks.

ISIS in Libya

- ◆ ISIS's Libyan branch, described by CIA Director John Brennan in June 2016 as "the most developed and the most dangerous" of its affiliates, has been dislodged from its base in the coastal city of Sirte. The Misrata brigades claimed they took the last ISIS-held building in the city, backed by U.S. airstrikes. The loss of Sirte is a blow to ISIS' boast of expansion and its potential to recruit fighters. Yet, ISIS fighters will continue to have a presence in other parts of Libya and they may establish a new base and sanctuary in southern Libya upon their withdrawal from Sirte.

ISIS in Egypt

- ◆ ISIS's affiliate in Egypt, which blew up a commercial passenger plane in 2015, has maintained its foothold in the Sinai Peninsula. Based on images released in November by ISIS-affiliated Ansar Bayt al Maqdis, the group purportedly executed a 100-year-old Sufi Cleric in the Sinai Peninsula for "practicing witchcraft." In October, ISIS claimed an additional attack in the Sinai at an Egyptian military checkpoint killing 12 soldiers.

Boko Haram

- ◆ In 2015, Boko Haram claims to have pledged allegiance to ISIS in March 2016, a pledge ISIS purportedly accepted the same month.

ISIS in East Africa

- ◆ ISIS's supporters in East Africa have established a base in Puntland, Somalia, and are actively recruiting followers under the direction of a former Al Shabaab operative. The group is gaining ground in the Puntland region as it retains control of the fishing town of Qandala.

ISIS in Afghanistan

- ◆ ISIS's affiliate in Afghanistan has been vying for control over territory in eastern Afghanistan despite joint U.S.-Afghan operations targeting it. In early October 2016, a U.S. service member was killed by an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan's Nangarhar Province during a patrol with Afghan forces as part of a counterterrorism mission against ISIS in the country.
- ◆ While the terrorist group, largely comprised of former Pakistani Taliban fighters, traditionally operate in southern Nangarhar province along the border with Pakistan, ISIS-claimed attacks have also occurred in other parts of country.
- ◆ In November, ISIS carried out a suicide bomb attack in a Shia mosque in Kabul, killing at least 32.



ISIS in Yemen

- ◆ In Yemen, ISIS has exploited the ongoing civil war to expand its footprint. It recently claimed responsibility for killing a local security official in Aden.

ISIS in Southeast Asia

- ◆ The head of the Australian Secret Intelligence Service recently warned that ISIS-affiliated groups in Indonesia and the Philippines pose a growing terror threat.

ISIS in Turkey

- ◆ According to the Interior Ministry, Turkey arrested 365 suspected ISIS terrorists across the country in November; 131 now face trial.

ISIS in the Balkans

- ◆ In mid-November, police in Kosovo thwarted a planned series of synchronized terror attacks that involved 19 people and targeted Kosovo and other Balkan nations. Among these targets was a November 12 World Cup qualifying match between Israel and Albania. In Kosovo, at least 200 people have been either investigated or detained in recent years due to alleged links to ISIS, and an additional 300 Kosovars have traveled to Syria to join ISIS.

AL QAEDA: UPDATES

Jabhat al Nusra (JN)/Jabhat Fatah al Sham

- ◆ Syria-based Jabhat al Nusra (JN) is Al Qaeda's largest affiliate. It will continue to support al Qaeda's ideology and intent to attack the West despite its recent "separation" announcement and name change to Jabhat Fatah al Sham, according to NCTC Director Nicholas Rasmussen.
- ◆ Syrian opposition fighters are forming stronger alliances with Jabhat al Nusra. The group has increasingly integrated Syrian opposition fighters to counter coordinated assaults from the forces of the Assad regime, Russia, as well as Iran and its proxies. It has been gaining traction within the Syrian population and could consolidate its control over a "protected territorial base" on the borders of Europe that the international community would find very hard to eliminate. On November 18, senior al Qaeda leader Abu Afghan Al-Masri was killed by a U.S. air strike. According to Pentagon Spokesman Peter Cook, Al-Masri was a well-connected threat. "He had ties to terrorist groups operating throughout Southwest Asia including groups responsible for attacking U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan and those plotting to attack the West," Cook said.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)

- ◆ Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), supported by up to 4,000 members, has exploited the ongoing conflict in Yemen to "provide a haven from which to plan future attacks" against the U.S. and its allies. AQAP has intertwined itself with local militias and civilian populations as a way to increase its influence and continues to attack the al Houthi-Saleh alliance comprised of Houthi rebels and security forces loyal to former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh.



Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)

- ◆ Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has launched several major attacks in West Africa since late 2015. AQIM has been attempting to expand its influence in Libya, including through the utilization of proxies.
- ◆ November marks one year since the 2015 attack on the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako, Mali that killed 19 civilians and one member of the Malian security services, including an American aid worker. The hotel is popular amongst foreigners, and 12 Americans were rescued. Al-Mourabitoun, a branch of AQIM, claimed credit for the attack.

Al Shabaab

- ◆ Al Qaeda's affiliate in Somalia, al Shabaab, continues to pose a threat to Western and regional interests in East Africa despite being weakened by local security forces. Recently, the Obama administration reinterpreted the Congressional authorization to use force against those involved in the attacks of September 11, 2001 to cover Al Shabaab. This decision is likely to pave the way for an uptick in strikes against the group.
- ◆ The group "retains the ability to retake territory" in Somalia and is using the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops supporting the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to occupy strategic towns in the south-central part of the country.
- ◆ This month, al Shabaab claimed an attack on an army convoy near parliament in Mogadishu, killing at least two soldiers and wounding five others.

Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS)

- ◆ Al Qaeda and its affiliate Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) have recently maintained a presence inside Afghanistan. The Defense Department assessed in May 2016 that Al Qaeda has increased its cooperation with the Taliban and can act as an accelerant for the Taliban's operations. The Taliban either controls or is fighting for control over at least 30 percent of Afghanistan's population.
- ◆ According General John Nicholson, commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, the Al Qaeda-aligned Haqqani Network constitutes "the primary threat to Americans, to coalition members and to Afghans, especially in and around Kabul."
- ◆ The Pentagon confirmed that a U.S. strike in October had removed senior al Qaeda leader Nayef Salam Muhammad Ujaym al-Hababi from the battlefield. Officials claimed it was "the most significant Al Qaeda strike in Afghanistan in several years."

THE TALIBAN: UPDATES

- ◆ A suicide bomb attack carried out by the Taliban at Bagram Airfield claimed the lives of four Americans, and wounded 16 U.S. servicemen and one NATO soldier.
 - ◆ The same week a suicide car bomber attacked the German consulate in Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan. Six were killed and 128 were injured.
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GUANTANAMO BAY DETAINEES

- ◆ The Director of National Intelligence's most recent assessment of recidivism among former Guantanamo Bay detainees concluded that at least 30 percent of detainees released have returned or are suspected of having returned to jihadist activity. At least 20 detainees released since 2009 are known or suspected to have reengaged in the fight.
- ◆ There are now 59 detainees left at Guantanamo Bay; as of early December 2016, 20 are held in law-of-war detention but have been recommended for transfer if security conditions are met.
- ◆ *The Washington Post* reported in June 2016 that the Obama Administration has assessed that at least a dozen former Guantanamo detainees have conducted deadly attacks on American and allied forces in Afghanistan following their release.

THE IRANIAN TERROR THREAT

- ◆ As many as 100,000 Iranian-backed Shia militias known as the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) continue to fight alongside U.S.-backed Iraqi troops in the battle to regain Mosul from ISIS control. Additionally, Iranian-directed militias deployed to Syria to assist the Assad regime have been exacerbating sectarian conflict and helping create the conditions that allow Sunni extremists to thrive.
- ◆ Iranian-backed forces in Yemen recently launched multiple missile attacks targeting a U.S. Navy vessel operating in the Red Sea. The Iranian regime has reportedly been increasing its provision of weapons, including missiles, to al Houthi fighters in Yemen. Iran's IRGC Navy has also threatened U.S. Navy vessels in the Arabian Gulf, deploying its missile ships and high-speed attack boats to conduct aggressive maneuvers, at least the fourth incident of that nature occurring within the span of one month.