

CORD

September 2016 Terror Threat Snapshot

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THE ISIS TERROR THREAT IN AMERICA

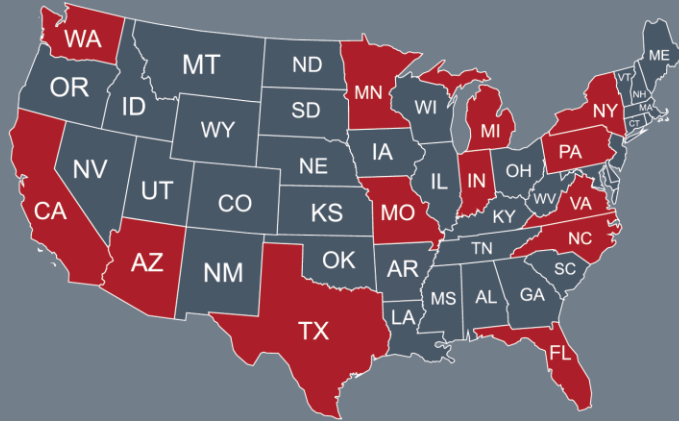
So far in 2016...

26 PEOPLE ARRESTED in...

13 STATES for...

California, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, Washington, New York, Florida, Indiana, Arizona, North Carolina, and District of Columbia

- ✓ PLOTS TO ATTACK
- ✓ OVERSEAS TRAVEL
- ✓ FINANCIAL SUPPORT
- ✓ LYING TO AUTHORITIES
- ✓ WEAPONS CHARGES



214 KILLED

*in ISIS-linked terrorist attacks
against the West in 2016...*

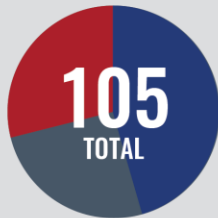
...including

49 KILLED

*in the worst post-9/11 terror
attack on U.S. soil in Orlando, Florida.*



ISIS-LINKED PLOTS TO ATTACK THE WEST



■ **47 IN EUROPE** ■ **30 IN THE U.S.**

■ **28 TARGETING WESTERNERS
OUTSIDE U.S./EUROPE**

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This document is produced by the Majority Staff of the House Homeland Security Committee. It is based on information culled from open source materials, including media reports, publicly available government statements, and nongovernmental assessments.



KEY POINTS

- **Islamist terrorists will continue to pose a significant threat to the United States and its allies -- ISIS and its supporters, undeterred by battlefield setbacks, have now been linked to 105 plots targeting Western interests globally.**
- **ISIS, al Qaeda, and other Islamist extremists have built a global network of sanctuaries they can leverage for directing and inspiring terrorist attacks.**
- **Radical Islamists are exploiting everything from social media applications, including encrypted technologies, to refugee flows to improve their ability to recruit adherents and conduct terror operations.**
- **Detainees freed from Guantanamo Bay have returned to the battlefield at an alarming rate, and now the recruiting pool for these terrorists has expanded under the Obama Administration's surge of transfers.**
- **An emboldened Iranian regime has been building its military capabilities, vying for hegemony across the Middle East, and threatening the United States and its allies.**

HOMEGROWN ISLAMIST EXTREMISM

- FBI Director James Comey estimated in May 2016 that around 80 percent of the Bureau's more than 1,000 active homegrown terror investigations are linked to ISIS. Attacks directed or inspired by ISIS represent "the greatest threat to the physical safety of Americans today," he added in July 2016.
- Since September 11, 2001, there have been at least 166 homegrown jihadist plots in the United States, including attempts to join terrorist groups overseas and execute attacks at home. More than 86 percent of these cases have occurred or been uncovered since 2009.¹
- Authorities have arrested 105 individuals in the U.S. and charged 4 others in absentia in ISIS-linked cases since 2014.² 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. Seven ISIS-linked terrorists have been killed while carrying out five separate attacks in California, Florida, Massachusetts, and Texas.
- Nearly 90 percent of the ISIS supporters charged in the U.S. are male and approximately 35 percent of them are converts to Islam; their average age is 26.³ Nearly one-third of the ISIS-linked individuals charged were involved in plotting attacks in the Homeland.

Recent Developments

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

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

³ These figures are provided by the George Washington University's Program on Extremism. See: <https://cchs.gwu.edu/sites/cchs.gwu.edu/files/downloads/August%202016%20Snapshot.pdf> and <https://cchs.gwu.edu/sites/cchs.gwu.edu/files/downloads/Snapshot-May.pdf>.



- August 24: Mohamed Amiin Ali Roble, a 20-year-old U.S. citizen from Minneapolis, Minnesota, was charged in absentia for his role in a terror cell that was sending members to join ISIS in Syria. Roble, who authorities suspect is currently in Syria, used legal settlement funds he received as a result of a bridge collapse to finance his terror activities.
- August 4: Erick Jamal Hendricks, a 35-year-old U.S. citizen from Charlotte, North Carolina, was arrested for attempting to recruit a cell of terror operatives that would eventually launch attacks inside the United States on behalf of ISIS. Hendricks had also previously communicated via social media with ISIS-linked attackers who targeted a cartoon contest in Garland, Texas in May 2015.
- August 3: Nicholas Young, a 36-year-old U.S. citizen and police officer for the Metro Transit Police Department from Fairfax, Virginia, was arrested in the District of Columbia after purchasing gift cards for mobile messaging accounts used by ISIS recruiters. He was known to the FBI previously for his association with several other convicted radical Islamists in the United States.
- July 31: Sebastian Gregorson, a 29-year-old U.S. citizen and convert to Islam living in Detroit, Michigan, was arrested for possessing a destructive device and acquiring explosive materials without a license. Gregorson appeared to have been an ISIS supporter and also possessed CDs titled “Anwar al Awlaki”.

ISIS TERROR ATTACK PLOTS AGAINST THE WEST

- There have been at least 105 ISIS-linked plots to attack Western targets since 2014, including 30 inside the United States.⁴

Recent Developments

- August 10: Canadian authorities killed a 24-year-old ISIS supporter, Aaron Driver, who had been plotting to conduct a suicide bombing and was in possession of an explosive device when police confronted him. Driver was known to authorities as a potential terrorist and had been living under a “peace bond,” which is a court order imposing certain conditions on an individual in the absence of a criminal trial.
- August 6: A 33-year-old Algerian illegally residing in Belgium attacked two police officers with a machete in a city south of Brussels. ISIS claimed the attacker was one of its supporters.

FOREIGN FIGHTERS

- More than 42,900 fighters—including at least 7,900 from Western countries—have reportedly traveled to Syria and Iraq from at least 120 countries since 2011. The Pentagon estimates that 200 to 500 fighters flow into Syria and Iraq every month. That estimate had spiked to as high as 2,000.

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



Around 250 of the Western fighters traveled from the United States and 5,000 of them traveled from European Union countries. 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.

- Europe will face a “long-term struggle” dealing with foreign fighter returnees, “some of whom will have been sent back on a mission,” according to Europol Director Rob Wainwright. A recent Syrian suicide bomber in Germany had reportedly sought asylum in Europe after illegally entering the continent in 2013. At least one of the European ISIS operatives in the March 2016 Brussels attack reportedly reentered Europe by posing as a Syrian refugee in Greece. At least two of the ISIS attackers in Paris last November infiltrated Europe by posing as Syrian refugees. Foreign fighters continue to use fake and stolen passports to return to—and travel throughout—Europe.
- 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 at least 10,000 Syrian refugees in the United States this fiscal year. The vetting process for these refugees is overseen by the Department of Homeland Security and the State Department, with assistance from U.S. government security agencies. It typically takes 18 to 24 months for refugees to be resettled in the United States after their applications are referred by the United Nations. 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.

FOREIGN JIHADIST NETWORKS & SAFE HAVENS

ISIS

- At least 34 Islamist extremist groups have pledged their allegiance to ISIS. 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 The group has established eight official branches.
- ISIS—in command of 18–22,000 fighters—controls around 20 cities and towns across Iraq and Syria, despite losing significant parts of its territory since 2014.⁶ As of late June, it still dominated more than 25,000 square miles of territory across the two countries.⁷ Since then, ISIS has been driven out of Manbij and Jarablus in northern Syria and out of Qayyarah in Iraq. The group has anchored its territorial claims in Syria and Iraq with strongholds in Raqqa and Mosul, respectively.
- 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 largely dislodged from its base in the coastal city

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

⁶ These figures are derived from assessments of territorial control conducted by the Institute for the Study of War research organization.

⁷ This figure was calculated based on an estimate of ISIS’s territorial control provided by Special President Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL Brett McGurk before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on June 28, 2016. See http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/062816_McGurk_Testimony.pdf.



of Sirte. ISIS fighters have a presence in other parts of Libya and they may establish a new base and sanctuary in southern Libya.

- ISIS's affiliate in Egypt, which blew up a commercial passenger plane in 2015, has maintained its foothold in the Sinai Peninsula with up to 1,000 fighters. Egyptian authorities recently announced they had targeted and killed the affiliate's leader. There has reportedly been increasing cooperation between ISIS in Sinai and the Palestinian terrorist group HAMAS based in the Gaza Strip. The Israeli Defense Forces assess that HAMAS has provided financial, training, communications, and medical support to ISIS in the Sinai.
- ISIS' affiliate in Afghanistan has been attempting to negotiate a ceasefire with the Taliban and expand northward after recently losing about one quarter of its forces as a result of coalition operations. Its leader was killed in a targeted strike in late July. The group, largely comprised of former Pakistan Taliban fighters, has traditionally operated in southern Nangarhar province along the Pakistan border.
- 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. Kenyan authorities have disrupted an ISIS-aligned cell involving medical students who were plotting an anthrax attack.
- In Yemen, ISIS has exploited the ongoing civil war to expand its footprint. It recently executed a major suicide bombing attack targeting a military recruiting center in Aden, killing 72 people. In Saudi Arabia, a Yemeni ISIS supporter recently targeted and killed a policeman.

Al Qaeda

- Syria-based Jabhat al Nusra has been operating as al Qaeda's "largest affiliate". National Counterterrorism Center Director Nicholas Rasmussen recently expressed concerns over al Qaeda's safe haven in Syria "because we know [al Qaeda] is trying to strengthen its global networks by relocating some of its remaining leadership cadre from South Asia to Syria." The recently announced rebranding of this al Qaeda's affiliate, announced as a "split" from al Qaeda, is unlikely to change the fundamental nature of the jihadist group, now named Jabhat Fatah al Sham.
- 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.
- Al Qaeda and its affiliate Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent have 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 control or contest 80 districts across Afghanistan. According to a recent nongovernmental assessment, if political instability and insecurity persist, "global [Islamic] extremist organizations will reconstitute their sanctuaries in Afghanistan's ungoverned spaces and pose enduring threats to U.S. national security."



- 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. It recently conducted a suicide car bombing targeting a popular hotel in Mogadishu. In June, U.S. Africa Command thwarted an al Shabaab attack plot against American military personnel in Somalia.
 - Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has launched several major attacks in West Africa since late 2015, which appear to be part of a broader targeting, financing, and recruiting campaign. Al Qaeda-linked groups are also operating in Libya.
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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 over 30 percent of detainees released have returned or are suspected of having returned to jihadist activity.
 - The Defense Department announced on August 15 the transfer of 15 detainees – 12 Yemenis and 3 Afghans – to the government of the United Arab Emirates. The group included bodyguards for Osama bin Laden, explosives experts, and trained al Qaeda fighters. There are now 61 detainees left at Guantanamo Bay; nearly a third of them are awaiting transfer overseas.
 - *The Washington Post* reported in June 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.
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THE IRANIAN TERROR THREAT

- Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Navy has recently deployed its missile ships and high-speed attack boats to conduct aggressive and threatening maneuvers near U.S. Navy vessels. These types of provocations have reportedly risen more than 50 percent since last year.
- Iran and Russia have recently enhanced their military cooperation through basing access and weapons system transfers. Iran's hosting of Russian military assets on its soil allows it to improve its deterrence capabilities. Russia's illicit transfer of the S-300 missile system to Iran represents a "strategic game changer" that will complicate U.S. military planning.
- Iran, the primary state sponsor of terrorism, has continued to increase its foothold in the Western hemisphere. Its senior officials recently took an official trip to cultivate their ties with anti-American regimes, including Cuba and Venezuela.
- The Iranian regime received \$400 million in cash from the Obama Administration in exchange for the release of three Americans illegally detained by Iran earlier in 2016. The Obama Administration reportedly "wouldn't let Iranians take control of the money until a Swiss Air Force plane carrying



three freed Americans departed from Tehran on Jan. 17. Once that happened, an Iranian cargo plane was allowed to bring the cash home from a Geneva airport that day.”

- The U.S. Treasury Department in July sanctioned three senior al Qaeda members operating inside Iran as part of a terror facilitation network. The broader al Qaeda network inside Iran has been operating there under a formal agreement with the Iranian regime.
- Iran’s terrorist proxy Lebanese Hezbollah has stockpiled an estimated 100,000 rockets and missiles, including weapons capable of hitting targets across all of Israel.