

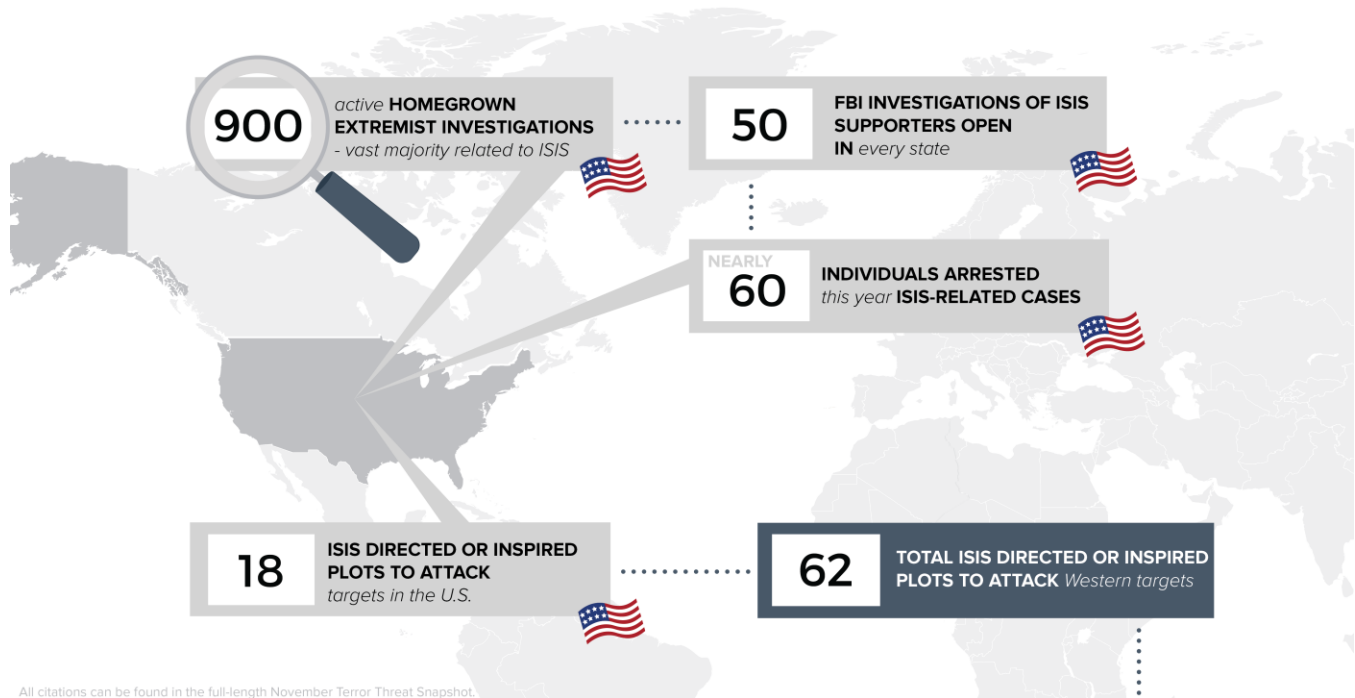
# CORD

## November 2015 Terror Threat Snapshot

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## THE ISLAMIST TERROR THREAT



## ISIS-LINKED GROUPS LAUNCHED

**12 ATTACKS KILLING 30+ PEOPLE DAILY**  
*between July & September 2015 on average*

**1,086** TOTAL ATTACKS — **2,978** NON-MILITANTS KILLED

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*This document is produced by the Majority Staff of the House Homeland Security Committee.*

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **ISIS is fueling an unprecedented tempo for law enforcement authorities combatting the homegrown Islamist extremist threat.** The vast majority of the 900 active homegrown extremist investigations involve links to ISIS. Authorities have already arrested nearly 60 individuals this year in ISIS-related cases.
- **ISIS's global expansion has unleashed a wave of violence around the world – including against Western targets.** From July through September this year, ISIS-affiliated groups launched around 12 attacks every day killing more than 30 people worldwide. ISIS's calls for attacks are resonating with its supporters in the West. ISIS has directed or inspired 62 plots to attack Western targets, including 18 inside the United States.



- **Al Qaeda and its affiliates are regenerating their terror networks and capitalizing on power vacuums.** Al Qaeda is exploiting the diminished American troop presence and weak local security forces in Afghanistan in order to rebuild its sanctuary. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has captured additional territory in Yemen amidst the ongoing war there.
- **Foreign fighters converging on the battlefields in Syria and Iraq pose a continuing threat to the United States and our allies.** A French fighter returnee reportedly described Syria as a “factory of jihadists” trained to launch external attacks in the near future. [A recent House Homeland Security Committee \(HSC\) bipartisan task force](#) found that security weaknesses overseas are enabling fighters to travel more freely.
- **The massive refugee flows out of Syria remain vulnerable to terrorists seeking to exploit the crisis to infiltrate the West.** American national security officials [cautioned](#) during a House Homeland Security Committee hearing on October 21 that our limited intelligence picture of the conflict zone in Syria has the potential to undermine the integrity of the U.S. refugee resettlement screening process.
- **Guantanamo Bay detainees transferred overseas continue to pose a threat to U.S. national security interests.** Nearly one in three detainees released from the facility have rejoined or are suspected of having rejoined Islamist terror groups. The Obama Administration transferred two more detainees out of Guantanamo in October.
- **The world’s leading state sponsor of Islamist terror, Iran, continues to sow instability and is poised to gain additional resources in the coming months as a result of sanctions relief.** Iran has ramped up its military involvement in Syria in conjunction with its proxies, the Assad regime, and Russia. The Obama Administration is preparing to provide Iran with additional sanctions relief under the terms of the nuclear agreement, meanwhile, the Iranian parliament [vowed](#) that the “martyr-nurturing nation of Iran” will continue chanting “Death to America.”

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## **HOMEGROWN ISLAMIST EXTREMISM**

***ISIS is fueling an unprecedented tempo for law enforcement authorities combatting the homegrown Islamist extremist threat.***

### By the numbers

- Since September 11, 2001, there have been 127 U.S. terrorist cases involving homegrown violent jihadists. Over 80 percent of these cases—which include plotted attacks and attempts to join foreign terrorist organizations—have occurred or been disrupted since 2009.<sup>1</sup>
- Authorities have arrested or charged at least 55 individuals in the United States this year – 71 since 2014 – in ISIS-related cases. The cases involve individuals: plotting attacks; attempting to travel to

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



join ISIS overseas; sending money, equipment and weapons to terrorists; falsifying statements to federal authorities; and failing to report a felony.<sup>2</sup>

- FBI Director James Comey said on October 23 that law enforcement authorities have around [900](#) active homegrown extremist cases, the overwhelming majority of which are related to ISIS. Assistant Attorney General for National Security John Carlin [said](#) on September 28 that law enforcement authorities have open investigations of suspected ISIS supporters in all 50 states.

### Recent Developments

- The threat to U.S. service members and government personnel persists, [due](#) in large part to ISIS's call for its supporters in the United States and the West to attack soldiers, law enforcement members, intelligence community employees, and other government officials.
- Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Jeh Johnson [told](#) a House Homeland Security Committee (HSC) hearing on October 21 that the July 2015 terror attack on service members in Chattanooga, Tennessee, appears to have been inspired by al Qaeda or ISIS.

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## **TERROR ATTACK PLOTS AGAINST THE WEST**

*ISIS's global expansion has unleashed a wave of violence around the world – including against Western targets.*

### By the numbers

- Since early 2014, there have been 62 ISIS-linked plots to attack Western targets, including 18 inside in the United States.<sup>3</sup>
- There have been more than twice as many ISIS-linked attack plots against Western targets in 2015 (42) than in 2014 (20).<sup>4</sup>

### Recent Developments

- [October 28](#): The head of the U.K.'s domestic security agency (MI5) Andrew Parker warned that ISIS is plotting mass-casualty attacks inside Britain. He added that the Islamist terror threat is “on a scale and at a tempo that I have not seen before in my career.” The U.K. has disrupted six terror attack plots in the last year.
- [October 25](#): U.S. Embassy Dhaka reissued a security message strongly encouraging American citizens in Bangladesh to take additional security precautions in the wake of recent attacks there.

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<sup>2</sup> This figure is based on open-source data compiled by the Majority Staff of the Homeland Security Committee.

<sup>3</sup> This figure is based on open-source data compiled by the Majority Staff of the Homeland Security Committee. Of the 15 attack plots in the United States, three of them have had more direct connections to ISIS (two plots involving hit lists released by ISIS's “hacking division” and the Garland, Texas, attack in which one of the perpetrators was reportedly [connected](#) via online communications to ISIS operative Junaid Hussain).

<sup>4</sup> This figure is based on open-source data compiled by the Majority Staff of the Homeland Security Committee.



U.S. government personnel and their families are already restricted from attending large gatherings and traveling through most public places.

- [October 15](#): A senior DHS official told an audience of American energy firms that ISIS is attempting to launch cyber attacks against power companies. An FBI cyber division official noted that while ISIS currently has “low capability” in cyber warfare, “the concern is that they’ll buy that capability.”
- [October 15](#): Malaysian authorities arrested a Kosovar citizen, Ardit Ferizi, who hacked into the network of an American company, stole personally identifiable information (PII) of U.S. military and government personnel, and shared the PII with ISIS operative Junaid Hussain, who was killed in an August 2015 [airstrike](#). The PII was distributed through social media platforms by ISIS in order to encourage its supporters in the United States to attack the individuals.
- ISIS is leveraging social media and encrypted technologies for operational planning against the U.S. homeland. As FBI Director Comey has [explained](#): “ISI[S] operators in Syria [are] recruiting and tasking dozens of troubled Americans to kill people, a process that increasingly takes part through mobile messaging apps that are end-to-end encrypted, communications that may not be intercepted, despite judicial orders under the Fourth Amendment.”
- ISIS aggressively exploits social media in order to recruit fighters, disseminate propaganda, and trigger attacks in the West. It has attracted around [21,000](#) English-language followers on Twitter. “There’s hundreds, maybe thousands” of ISIS followers in the United States, FBI Assistant Director Michael Steinbach [testified](#) at a June 2015 HSC hearing.
- ISIS [released](#) nearly 900 official videos between January 2014 and October 2015 – approximately 120 of which targeted Western audiences – according to George Washington University researcher Javier Lesaca. An estimated 27 percent of its videos were released in English. The most common themes across the videos were depictions of its battles, interviews with foreign fighters, its governing capacity, and executions. Nearly 20 percent of the videos employed imagery popular in Western culture, including references to video games and television shows.

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## FOREIGN FIGHTERS

*Foreign fighters, undeterred by U.S. and allied military operations, continue to pour into the jihadist breeding grounds in Syria and Iraq. These fighters pose immediate and long-term terror threats to their home countries and the United States.*

### By the numbers

- Nearly [30,000 fighters](#) from over 100 countries have traveled to Syria and Iraq to join extremists—the largest convergence of Islamist terrorists in world history. The rate of fighters flowing into the conflict zone – [1,000](#) per month – has remained constant as of September 2015.



- Approximately [4,500](#) Western fighters have traveled to Syria and Iraq,<sup>5</sup> but the figure is likely higher. Europol has [estimated](#) the number of EU citizens fighting in the conflict zone to be as high as 5,000.
- Approximately [250 Americans](#) have traveled – or attempted to travel – to Syria to fight. [Several dozen](#) were believed to be fighting with ISIS earlier this year. As of March 2015, around [40 American fighters](#) who traveled to Syria have returned to the United States. FBI Director Comey told the HSC on October 21 that the rate at which Americans are trying to join Islamist extremists groups like ISIS [has](#) decreased, but he cautioned that this assessment could be skewed due to a lack of information.
- An estimated [550](#) Western women have traveled to the conflict zone. A British woman, Sally Jones, is “[actively](#) working to incite attacks and recruit new members,” [particularly](#) women. Another British woman, Aqsa Mahmood, [serves](#) as a recruiter of Western women and member of an all-female police unit based in Raqqa, Syria (al-Khansaa Brigade).
- In addition to fighters joining Sunni extremist groups like ISIS and Jabhat al Nusra in Syria, an estimated [20,000](#) Shi’a fighters, including from Lebanese Hezbollah and Iraqi militias, are fighting alongside the Bashar al Assad regime under Iranian direction.

### Recent Developments

- A French citizen who returned to France from Syria said the war zone had become “a factory of jihadists trained to hit France and Europe in the very near future,” [according](#) to a report from France’s Justice Ministry.
- [October 14](#): German authorities arrested a suspected ISIS recruiter and military equipment supplier in Berlin. The individual, Murad Atajev, was identified as a Russian national from Dagestan who is a preacher at a Russian-speaking Berlin mosque. He operates pro-ISIS social media accounts and is believed to be linked to a Berlin-based network recruiting Turkish and Russian fighters for ISIS.

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## **FOREIGN JIHADIST NETWORKS & SAFE HAVENS**

*Islamist terror groups from ISIS to al Qaeda are exploiting power vacuums and putting down deeper roots across the Middle East and North Africa.*

### By the numbers

- ISIS now has a direct presence, affiliates, or groups pledging support in at least 19 countries or territories, including Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Lebanon, Nigeria, the Palestinian territories (Gaza), Pakistan, Philippines, Russia (North Caucasus region), Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> National Counterterrorism Center Deputy Director John Mulligan, testimony before the House Homeland Security Committee, June 3, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Data compiled by the Majority Staff of the Homeland Security Committee.



- ISIS controls at least 12 cities and towns in Iraq, including the provincial capital of Anbar province, Ramadi, and the second-largest city in the country, Mosul. It controls at least 13 cities and towns in Syria, including the northern city of Raqqa and Abu Kamal, a city near the Euphrates River along the border with Iraq.<sup>7</sup> ISIS also holds roughly [70 miles](#) of territory along Syria's border with Turkey.
- ISIS controls energy resources in its territory and makes approximately [\\$500 million](#) from annual oil sales, according to Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing Daniel Glaser. A recent non-governmental assessment estimated that ISIS [produces](#) up to 40,000 barrels of crude oil every day and sells that quantity for nearly \$1.5 million. It also [generates](#) income through taxation, extortion, bank looting, kidnapping for ransom, human trafficking, stolen antiquities sales, and external donations.
- ISIS-linked groups launched 1,086 attacks across the world between July and September 2015, [according](#) to a study by IHS Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Center. The study concluded that ISIS's "...capacity to wage a territorial-focused insurgency in conjunction with a punitive campaign of terrorist attacks remains undiminished despite an increasingly broad spectrum of armed opposition."

### Recent Developments

- ISIS Safe Haven in Syria and Iraq
  - ISIS has largely maintained its territory in northern and central Syria over the last month while attempting to make advances on multiple fronts. It exploited the bombing campaign by Russia against Syrian rebel forces by [seizing](#) villages north of Aleppo on October 9. It is currently [attempting](#) to sever an Assad regime supply line southeast of Aleppo.
  - Despite public statements, ISIS has not been a primary [target](#) for Russian airstrikes that commenced on September 30. Russia's indiscriminate attacks will likely "unify the Syrian opposition with the jihadists against the Russians and Assad," according to an [assessment](#) by non-government analysts.
  - ISIS has maintained control of [Ramadi](#), the capital of Iraq's largely Sunni-populated Anbar province along the Syrian border, after seizing it in May 2015. Iraqi Security Forces have maneuvered [toward](#) Ramadi and secured some territory surrounding it while clearing improvised explosive devices emplaced by ISIS along the approaches to the city. The ISF are "consolidating and reorganizing" in advance of an attempt to retake Ramadi. A force consisting of Iraqi counterterrorism troops, federal police, and Shi'a militias are simultaneously attempting to [clear](#) the city of Bayji and a key oil refinery complex. ISIS has maintained its primary stronghold in Iraq, Mosul, despite ongoing targeted airstrikes [against](#) its personnel and military assets there.
  - Tikrit, Iraq, and surrounding areas that have been largely cleared of ISIS networks remain insecure given the destabilizing actions of Shi'a militia fighters. "Abusive [Shi'a extremist]

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<sup>7</sup> These figures are derived from assessments of territorial control conducted by the Institute for the Study of War research organization.



militias and their commanders acting with impunity undermine the campaign against ISIS and put all civilians at greater risk,” according to a September 2015 [study](#).

- Emerging ISIS Safe Havens and Affiliates
  - ISIS has established a significant presence in Libya. Its affiliated militants have maintained and consolidated their control over Sirte, which sits along Libya’s Mediterranean coastline. ISIS fighters continue to pose a threat to Libya’s [oil](#) infrastructure.
  - Libya has become a key training ground for Tunisian militants joining ISIS, some of whom have left Syria to [relocate](#) to Libya. An estimated [3,000 fighters](#) in Libya are aligned with ISIS. In late 2014, a Libyan ISIS facilitator who had been trained by al Qaeda in Iraq founder Abu Musab al Zarqawi [set up](#) an ISIS outpost in Libya. ISIS reportedly began funneling [money and military trainers](#) to fighters in Libya earlier in 2015.
  - ISIS continues to assert its presence in Yemen through its local affiliate, which claimed responsibility for a series of suicide [bombings](#) on October 6, 2015, targeting both the Saudi-led coalition and the Iranian-backed al Houthi rebels. ISIS’s Yemeni affiliate has been fundraising and recruiting fighters since 2014, including [under](#) the leadership of Saudi national Nasir Muhammad Awad al Ghidani al Harbi.
  - ISIS’s affiliate in Afghanistan and Pakistan (“Khorasan”) has continued to broaden its reach and increase its operating tempo. It has between 1,000 and 3,000 [members](#) in Afghanistan. The affiliate consists primarily of Afghan and Pakistani Taliban defectors and is [led](#) by former Tehrik-e Taliban commander Hafiz Saeed Khan. Khan has appointed representatives for Kunar and Nangarhar provinces in Afghanistan and sought to [establish](#) training camps in western Afghanistan. ISIS-Khorasan reportedly [operates](#) out of the Tirah valley region in Pakistan’s western tribal areas.
  - ISIS’s affiliate in the Caucasus [called](#) for its supporters to “wage jihad in the Caucasus.” ISIS leader al Baghdadi formally accepted a pledge of allegiance from followers in Russia’s North [Caucasus](#) region in July 2015. Rustam Aselderov, a former al Qaeda-affiliated commander, is the [head](#) of this group and pledged his allegiance to ISIS leader al Baghdadi in December 2014. As many as [2,500](#) fighters from this region have joined extremists in Syria and Iraq.
  - ISIS’s established affiliate in the Egyptian Sinai [controls](#) territory in the northeast part of the peninsula. The group has attacked Egyptian security forces, Western targets, and most [recently](#) government-aligned tribal militias.
  - ISIS has been attempting to exploit the recent spate of Palestinian terror attacks in Israel. It [released](#) a video of a Hebrew-speaking member threatening attacks against Jews. An ISIS-aligned group based in the Gaza Strip, the Sheikh Omar Hadid Brigade, [claimed](#) credit for rocket attacks on Israel on October 4.
  - ISIS-aligned militants have escalated their operations inside Bangladesh. In late September 2015, ISIS supporters [claimed](#) credit for the killing of an Italian aid worker in Dhaka. They also took responsibility for the shooting [death](#) of a Japanese citizen in northern Bangladesh. Social media





accounts [affiliated](#) with ISIS also claimed credit for the October 24 bombing of Shi'a worshippers in Dhaka.

- ISIS [gained](#) a pledge of allegiance from Somali cleric Abdul Qadir Mumin. Mumin was a member of al Shabaab, the Somalia-based al Qaeda affiliate that has reportedly been trying to [crack](#) down against potential defectors in its ranks. An unconfirmed [estimate](#) from Somali government sources indicates that less than 10 percent of al Shabaab's membership would switch their allegiance from al Qaeda to ISIS.
- Al Qaeda Safe Havens and Affiliates
  - National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) Director Nicholas Rasmussen [told](#) the HSC on October 21: "...I'm still not ready to declare core al-Qa'ida as having been defeated in the classical sense of the word where the capability has been removed."
  - AQAP has been [expanding](#) into the Yemeni port city of Aden. Recent [efforts](#) to expel AQAP militants from the city have failed. NCTC Director Rasmussen [warned](#) in September 2015 that the ongoing war in Yemen, and the diminished U.S. presence there, "significantly complicates our ability to conduct counterterrorism operations in Yemen." AQAP remains "more capable of carrying out larger-scale attacks against the homeland" than ISIS, [according](#) to Director Rasmussen.
  - Al Qaeda [remains](#) a threat in Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan where it is working to reconstitute its networks and attack capabilities. It [built](#) a sizable sanctuary in southern Afghanistan where it established two training camps over territory covering almost [31](#) square miles. Al Qaeda had been [operating](#) the camps for nearly one year before U.S. and Afghan forces targeted and dismantled them in early October. The camps were built to [facilitate](#) "weapons training (small arms to advanced explosive training, indirect fire), chemistry to produce advanced explosives, and higher level sniper training."
  - The al Qaeda-aligned Afghan Taliban has waged an offensive campaign to seize territory in Afghanistan, [particularly](#) in the northern city of Kunduz and the southern city of Helmand. Commander of U.S. Forces-Afghanistan General John Campbell [described](#) the recent performance of local Afghan security forces as "uneven and inconsistent" and assessed that "they do not possess the necessary combat power and numbers to protect every part of the country" from the Taliban and other insurgent groups.
  - Al Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al Nusra (JN) maintains a significant presence in northern Syria and has threatened areas surrounding the capital, Damascus. Two Islamist militant groups, Ahrar al Sham and the Islamic Union of Jund al Sham, announced they had [joined](#) forces with JN in the eastern suburbs of Damascus on October 22. JN has been a prominent force in an anti-Assad regime coalition [supported](#) by Qatar, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia.
  - The Khorasan Group is a network of veteran al Qaeda operatives in Syria that has been plotting attacks against American and allied targets. An October 15 airstrike [eliminated](#) the group's most senior leader in Syria, Saudi national Sanafi al Nasr.



- Al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri [reiterated](#) the group's long-term goal of establishing an Islamic caliphate in a new audio recording. He also called on Muslims to "liberate" Jerusalem, to attack America and its allies, and to unite in order to counter the U.S., Europe, Russia, and Iran and its proxies.
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## **GUANTANAMO BAY DETAINEES**

*Detainees released from Guantanamo Bay continue to return to the fight. The Obama Administration has continued to transfer extremists out of Guantanamo and has vowed to close the facility.*

- The Office of the Director of National Intelligence's (ODNI) most recent [assessment](#) of recidivism among former Guantanamo Bay detainees concludes that 30 percent of detainees released have resumed or are suspected of having returned to jihadist activity. The September 2015 assessment concluded that 11 more detainees were believed to have returned to the battlefield since the previous [report](#) issued in March 2015.
  - The Obama Administration [released](#) Guantanamo Bay detainee Ahmed Ould Abdel Aziz, who [reportedly](#) said he would join ISIS's ranks. Aziz, who was captured in 2002 at a suspected al Qaeda safe house in Karachi, Pakistan, was transferred to the Mauritanian government on October 29. Shaker Aamer was [transferred](#) to the U.K. on October 30. There are now 112 detainees left at the facility.
  - The Department of Defense is [preparing](#) recommendations for the transfer of Guantanamo detainees to prisons inside the United States as part of a push to close the facility. It recently completed assessments of two prisons in Colorado.
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## **TERRORISTS' EXPLOITATION OF REFUGEE FLOWS**

*Islamist terrorists have [infiltrated the West in the past](#) through refugee programs and groups like ISIS may seek to exploit the current refugee flows. The Obama Administration's proposal to resettle Syrian refugees in the U.S. would have minimal impact on the refugee crisis but a potentially major impact on our homeland security.*

- The Obama administration has [proposed](#) resettling at least 10,000 more Syrian refugees in the U.S. this coming fiscal year, in addition to more than 1,800 already resettled since 2011.
- Senior U.S. officials have repeatedly [testified](#) that we lack the on-the-ground intelligence in Syria needed to confidently vet individuals and identify security risks in the process of screening Syrian refugees for resettlement. NCTC Director Rasmussen [reinforced](#) those concerns to the HSC on October 21 when he said that the intelligence picture in Syria "isn't what we'd like it to be."
- FBI Director Comey [told](#) the HSC on October 21: "...if someone has not made a ripple in the pond in Syria in a way that would get their identity or their interests reflected in our databases, we can



query our databases until the cows come home but nothing will show up because we have no record of that person... You can only query what you have collected.” DHS Secretary Johnson added: “It is true that we are not going to know a whole lot about the Syrians that come forth in this process.”

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## **THE IRANIAN TERROR THREAT**

*The nuclear agreement with Iran will provide hundreds of billions of dollars in economic relief to a regime that continues to support terrorists and undermine American national security interests.*

- The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear agreement with Iran was formally [adopted](#) on October 18 when President Obama [directed](#) relevant government agencies to prepare to loosen economic sanctions on Iran. The sanctions relief measures will be implemented after the International Atomic Energy Agency verifies that Iran has completed a series of changes to its nuclear program agreed to under the JCPOA.
- A number of Iranian banks are expected to be [reconnected](#) to the global financial system through the Society for the Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications (SWIFT) after Iran meets its initial JCPOA obligations. As a result of this reintegration, Iran “will be [poised](#) to more easily move funds to terrorists’ coffers, foment conflict around the region, and possibly even procure equipment for a clandestine weapons program.”
- The commander of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force Qassem Suleimani is [overseeing](#) a ground offensive to retake Aleppo with a force consisting of pro-Assad Syrian fighters, Iranian military personnel and volunteers, Lebanese Hezbollah operatives, and Shi’a militias, including those who have been [redeployed](#) from Iraq to Syria.
- Kata’ib Hezbollah, an Iraqi Shi’a militia designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the U.S., claimed it deployed approximately [1,000](#) of its “special forces” who had fought against American forces in Iraq to Aleppo.
- Iran’s military escalation in Syria will further fuel the war and raises the longer term [prospect](#) of “battle hardened Iranian forces willing to fight in the open across borders.” Iran [has](#) upwards of 1,000 military personnel in Iraq and up to 2,000 more in Syria.
- Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah [vowed](#) to continue fighting Israel and threatened to confront U.S. interests in the Middle East during an October 23 speech. Nasrallah revealed on October 18 that Hezbollah’s Syrian [footprint](#) was “larger than ever before – qualitatively, quantitatively, and in [terms of] equipment, because we are in a critical and definitive battle.”
- Bahrain’s Foreign Minister Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmad al Khalifa [said](#) on October 13 that Iran’s IRGC has trained 85 Bahrain-based terrorists in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon.