



THE ISIS TERROR THREAT IN AMERICA



Since 2009... **ISLAMIST TERRORISTS HAVE KILLED 90 PEOPLE INSIDE THE U.S.**

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KEY POINTS

- **Islamist terrorists pose an increasing threat globally, including in the United States where last month an ISIS supporter executed the deadliest terror attack on American soil since 9/11.** Authorities arrested on July 3 another ISIS supporter in Virginia who had been enlisted by an ISIS member overseas to assist with an attack on American soil. A senior ISIS official publicly encouraged followers before the Orlando nightclub attack: “The smallest action you carry out in their homelands is better and more favored by us from the biggest of actions in our midst.”
- **Radical Islamists have escalated the pace of their attacks – they have killed nearly 250 people across 4 countries in the last week.** ISIS-linked terrorists killed 45 people and wounded hundreds more at Atatürk Airport in Istanbul, Turkey, on June 28. Since then, ISIS-linked attackers targeted a



shopping district in Baghdad, Iraq, and a café in Dhaka, Bangladesh, where they killed one American among others. Yesterday, jihadists struck multiple cities in Saudi Arabia, including at a site near the U.S. consulate in Jeddah.

- **ISIS and al Qaeda have carved out sanctuaries from where they can recruit, train, and deploy operatives to launch external operations.** Al Qaeda has established its “largest affiliate” ever in Syria, while ISIS, which has expanded into North Africa and South Asia, still dominates more than 25,000 square miles of terrain across Iraq and Syria.
- **Islamist terror operatives have infiltrated the West by exploiting massive migrant and refugee flows.** Trained and deadly foreign fighters and Syrian terrorists posing as refugees have been involved in recent attack plots in France, Belgium, and Germany.
- **Former Guantanamo Bay detainees have returned to the battlefield at an alarming rate.** At least a dozen former Guantanamo detainees reportedly participated in deadly attacks against American and allied forces in Afghanistan after their release.
- **Iran has remained the “foremost state sponsor of terrorism” in the wake of the disastrous nuclear deal.** The regime’s continued aggression in Syria and support for groups attacking Israel demonstrate its unmoved hostility toward the U.S. 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. The group’s “ability to motivate troubled souls, to inspire them, remains a persistent” threat in America, he added.
- Since September 11, 2001, there have been at least 157 homegrown jihadist plots in the United States, including attempts to join terrorist groups overseas and execute attacks at home. More than 85 percent of these cases have occurred or been uncovered since 2009.¹
- Authorities have arrested 91 individuals in the U.S. and charged 3 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 almost 40 percent of them are converts to Islam; their average age is 26.³ Law enforcement authorities arrested around one-third of ISIS-linked suspects on their way to join ISIS overseas.

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 data points are from the George Washington University’s Program on Extremism. See:

<https://cchs.gwu.edu/sites/cchs.gwu.edu/files/downloads/Snapshot-May.pdf>.



Recent Developments

- July 3: Mohamed Bailor Jalloh, a 26-year-old naturalized U.S. citizen and former U.S. Army National Guard member, was arrested for helping plot an attack in America on behalf of ISIS. A member of ISIS who is now dead had communicated with Jalloh and directed him to assist with the execution of a plot with another individual. Jalloh traveled to Nigeria in 2015 where investigators believe he met with ISIS members. Jalloh also indicated he was inspired by Anwar al Awlaki's online sermons and Nidal Hassan's attack jihadist at Fort Hood in 2009.
- July 1: Mahin Khan, an 18-year-old from Tucson, Arizona, was arrested for plotting to attack government buildings in Phoenix and Tucson. Khan's classmate said he posted "calls for Jihad" on Facebook.
- June 30: Mohimanul Alam Bhuyia, a 27-year-old U.S. citizen from New York, was arrested in November 2014 after returning to the U.S. from Syria where he had joined ISIS. Bhuyia contacted the FBI in October 2014 claiming to be an ISIS defector.
- June 21: Akram Musleh, an 18-year-old U.S. citizen, was arrested while trying to travel to join ISIS in Libya. The FBI interviewed Musleh in 2013 after he posted several videos of Anwar al Awlaki on YouTube. His school subsequently attempted "to dissuade Musleh from engaging in radical extremism."¹¹
- June 12: ISIS supporter Omar Mateen, a 29-year-old U.S. citizen whom the FBI had previously investigated, shot and killed 49 people and injured 53 others at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida. Mateen pledged allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi during a 911 call he made during the attack.
- June 9: Mohamad Jamal Khweis, a 26-year-old U.S. citizen, was charged with providing material support to ISIS after he joined the group in Iraq last year. Iraqi Kurdish authorities detained Khweis in March 2016 after he left an ISIS stronghold in northern Iraq.

ISIS TERROR ATTACK PLOTS AGAINST THE WEST

- There have been at least 96 ISIS-linked plots to attack Western targets since 2014, including 28 inside the U.S.⁴

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- July 1: ISIS-linked terrorists attacked a café in Bangladesh’s capital that expatriates were known to visit. The attackers killed at least 22 people, including an American citizen and two individuals studying at U.S. universities.
 - June 18: Belgian authorities disrupted an attack plot after arresting a dozen individuals connected to the ISIS network responsible for previous terror attacks in Paris and Brussels.
 - June 13: ISIS supporter Larossi Ababalla, a 25-year-old French citizen known to authorities for his radical Islamist views, killed a local police official and his wife in the couple’s home outside Paris.
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 - June 6: ISIS supporters released a “kill list” consisting of more than 8,300 individuals’ names and physical addresses. The overwhelming majority of the entries appeared to be in the United States.
 - April 29: German authorities recently confirmed that a 15-year-old girl who stabbed a police officer in Hanover earlier this year had previously traveled to Turkey in an attempt to join ISIS in Syria. ISIS middlemen in Turkey directed her to launch an attack in Germany.
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FOREIGN FIGHTERS

- More than 40,000 fighters—including at least 6,900 from Western countries—have traveled to Syria and Iraq from at least 120 countries since 2011. Around 250 of the Westerners traveled from the United States and 5,000 of them traveled from European Union countries. Around one-third of the European fighters are suspected to have returned home from Syria. 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.
- The Pentagon estimated in April 2016 that up to 500 foreign fighters travel to Syria and Iraq every month. That number had spiked to as high as 2,000. ISIS has encouraged fighters to head to Libya.
- Europol recently assessed that there was an “increased risk” that foreign fighters may exploit migratory flows to enter Europe. German authorities arrested several Syrian nationals plotting an attack in Dusseldorf in early June. 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. Several of the ISIS attackers in Paris last November also infiltrated Europe by posing as Syrian refugees.
- 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 plans to resettle at least 10,000 Syrian refugees in the U.S. this year. Over 4,600 Syrian refugees have been resettled in the U.S. since 2011, including more than 2,800 this fiscal



year. Law enforcement and intelligence officials have repeatedly indicated that the U.S. lacks the reliable and credible intelligence required 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 currently operate in approximately two dozen 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.⁵ The group has established eight official branches. ISIS may soon declare a new branch in the Philippines, where several jihadist groups have pledged allegiance to it.
- ISIS—in command of 18–22,000 fighters—controls nearly two dozen cities and towns across Iraq and Syria, despite losing some of its territory since 2014.⁶ It still dominates more than 25,000 square miles of territory across the two countries.⁷ ISIS also occupies around 60 miles of strategic terrain along Syria’s northern border with Turkey. The group has anchored its territorial claims in Syria and Iraq with strongholds in Raqqa and Mosul, respectively.
- ISIS’s Libyan branch, “the most developed and the most dangerous” of its affiliates, has fielded as many as 8,000 fighters. Anti-ISIS forces have recently taken territory from ISIS and continue to fight the group in and around the coastal city of Sirte. A non-governmental organization recently assessed that ISIS will establish a new safe haven in southwest Libya in response to the pressure it is facing in Sirte.
- 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. It has recently attempted to expand its operations into central Sinai. The Israeli Defense Forces assess that HAMAS has provided financial, training, communications, and medical support to ISIS in the Sinai.
- In Afghanistan, ISIS’s estimated 1–3,000 fighters primarily operate in southern Nangarhar province along the Pakistan border. In Yemen, ISIS has exploited the ongoing civil war to expand its footprint, recently executing coordinated bombing attacks on pro-government security forces in southern Yemen.

Al Qaeda

- Syria-based Jabhat al Nusra (JN) is now al Qaeda’s “largest formal affiliate in history.” Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL Brett McGurk testified recently that JN is “providing safe haven for some of al Qaeda’s most experienced terrorists.”

⁵ Data compiled by the Majority Staff of the Homeland Security Committee.

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.



- Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which has up to 4,000 members, maintains a significant presence in Yemen, particularly in the south and in the east.
 - 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.
 - Al Qaeda's affiliate in Somalia, al Shabaab, continues to present a serious threat to Western and regional interests in east Africa. U.S. Africa Command assessed that al Shabaab was preparing to attack American military personnel in Somalia on June 21; U.S. forces conducted a strike that day to thwart the attack.
 - 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 *Washington Post* reported on June 8 that the Obama Administration has assessed that at least a dozen former Guantanamo detainees conducted attacks on American and allied forces in Afghanistan following their release.
 - The Defense Department announced on June 22 the transfer of Abdel Malik Ahmed Wahab al Rahabi to Montenegro. Al Rahabi, a Yemeni national, was reportedly suspected of being a bodyguard for Osama bin Laden. The Obama Administration has released 28 terrorists from Guantanamo Bay thus far in 2016. There are currently 79 remaining detainees at Guantanamo.
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THE IRANIAN TERROR THREAT

- The State Department concluded this month that Iran "remained the foremost state sponsor of terrorism in 2015."
- Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) has continued to deploy forces to Syria to support Assad's regime, empowering Sunni extremists and extending the conflict's duration and severity. IRGC Quds Force Commander Qassem Suleimani reportedly traveled to Aleppo in June where Iranian and allied forces are operating.
- The Iranian regime announced a deal to purchase from Boeing a new fleet of commercial aircraft, which it has previously used for military and terror-related operations.



- Iranian officials hosted senior leaders of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) terror organization for meetings in Iran in May. Iran has historically provided weapons, money, and training to PIJ, which has been targeting Israel for decades.
- The Iranian regime “may be able to deploy an operational [intercontinental ballistic missile] by 2020,” according to an April 2016 U.S. Northern Command assessment.