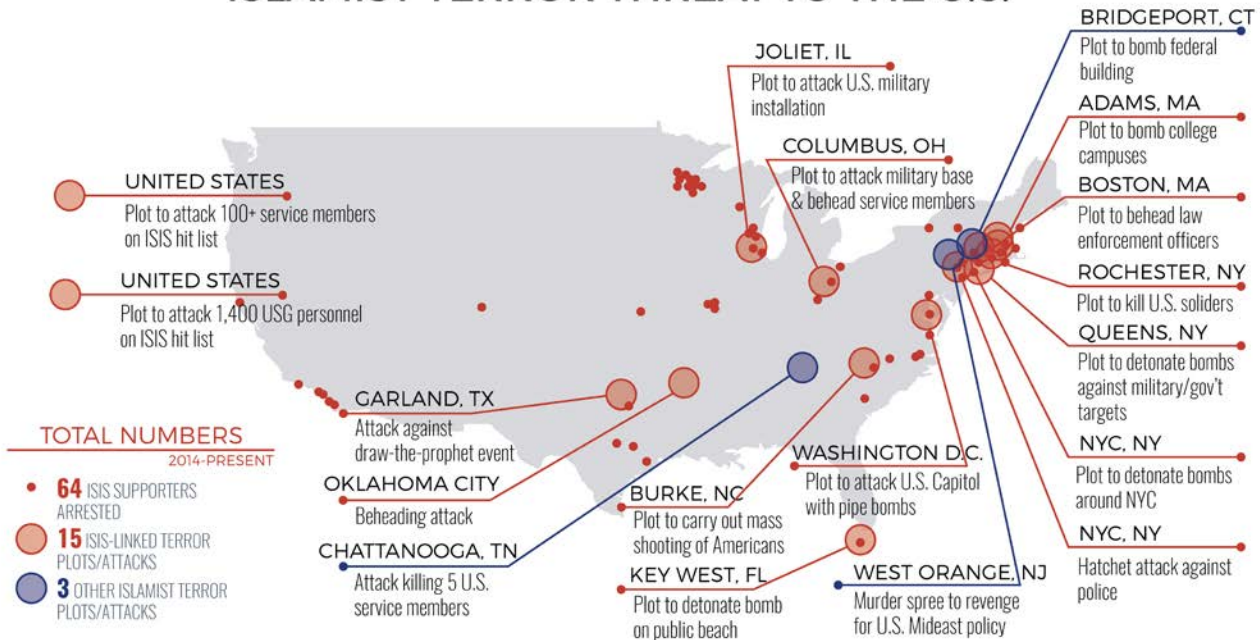
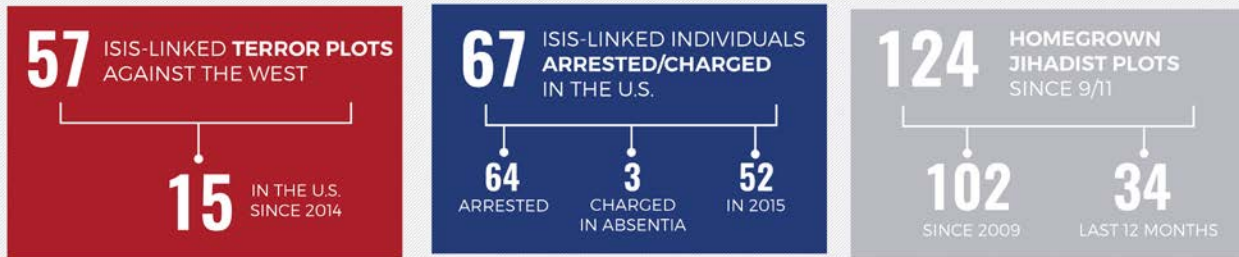




## ISLAMIST TERROR THREAT TO THE U.S.



## EXPANDING TERROR THREAT NUMBERS



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

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **The jihadist threat in the U.S. homeland is high and has escalated dramatically this year.** There have been more U.S.-based jihadist terror cases in 2015 than in any full year since 9/11. The number of U.S. terrorist cases involving homegrown violent jihadists has gone from 38 in July 2010 to 124 today—more than a three-fold increase in just five years.
- **ISIS is fueling the Islamist terror wildfire across the globe at unprecedented speed.** As of the end of August, the group has inspired or directed 57 terror attack plots against Western targets, including 15 in the United States. A recent train attack in France would have been a mass-casualty attack had it not been for an alert group of Americans. There have now been nearly twice as many ISIS-linked attack plots against the West this year (37) as there were in all of 2014 (20).
- **Islamist terrorists are intent on killing American law enforcement and military personnel, in addition to innocent civilians.** Radicals are increasingly targeting men and women in uniform here



in the United States. In August, ISIS supporters released another “hit list” of American government personnel, including service members. Since early 2014, the majority of Islamist terror plots on U.S. soil have featured plans to kill police or U.S. service members.

- **ISIS has largely maintained its terror safe havens in Syria and Iraq while expanding globally more than a year after the U.S. and its allies launched operations against it. Al Qaeda affiliates from Syria to Yemen have also carved out sanctuary and seized additional terrain.** ISIS retained control over its major strongholds in Syria and Iraq while undertaking disruption attacks and offensives in key territory; ISIS-affiliated militants have simultaneously consolidated control in Libya. Foreign fighters continue to swell the ranks of Islamist extremist groups looking to recruit foot soldiers and activate followers to launch attacks in their home countries.
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## **HOMEGROWN ISLAMIST EXTREMISM**

*The jihadist threat in the U.S. homeland is high and has escalated dramatically this year.*

### By the numbers

- Since September 11, 2001, there have been 124 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 52 individuals in the United States this year – 67 since 2014 – in ISIS-related cases. The cases involve individuals: plotting attacks; attempting to travel to 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 has said authorities have [hundreds](#) of open investigations of potential ISIS-inspired extremists that cover all 56 of the bureau’s field offices in all 50 states. He stated there may be hundreds or [thousands](#) of Americans who are taking in recruitment propaganda over social media applications: “It’s like the devil sitting on their shoulders, saying ‘kill, kill, kill.’”

### Recent Developments

- [August 24](#): Ahmed Mohammed El Gammal, 42, was arrested in Avondale, Arizona, for helping a 24-year-old New York City resident travel to Syria to receive military training from ISIS. El Gammal was an avid ISIS supporter online and engaged the recruit through social media before in-person meetings. El Gammal and the recruit communicated with an unnamed co-conspirator based in Turkey.
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## **TERROR PLOTS AGAINST THE WEST**

*ISIS is fueling the Islamist terror wildfire across the globe at unprecedented speed.*

<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.

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



### By the numbers

- Since early 2014, there have been 57 planned or executed ISIS-linked terror plots against Western targets, including 15 inside in the United States.<sup>3</sup>
- There have been nearly twice as many ISIS-linked plots against Western targets in the first seven months of this year (37) than in all of 2014 (20).<sup>4</sup>

### Recent Developments

- **August 21:** A 25-year-old Moroccan national, Ayoub El Khazzani, attacked passengers on a train in Thalys, France, before a group led by three Americans, including two service members on vacation, subdued him. Khazzani was armed with an arsenal of weapons and 270 rounds of [ammunition](#). He [watched](#) a jihadist propaganda video before attempting to launch his attack. He had lived in and attended a radical mosque in Spain before relocating to France. He had also lived in Belgium and [traveled](#) from Germany to Turkey in early May before returning to Europe in June. This trip was [reportedly](#) part of a [plot](#) to fight with ISIS in Syria.
- **August 13:** ISIS's "hacking division" released information regarding 1,400 American government personnel, including service members, and encouraged supporters to track down and attack them. The list included names, e-mail addresses, and phone numbers. ISIS operative and hacker Junaid Hussain had been central to similar plots targeting servicemembers; Hussain was [eliminated](#) in an August 24<sup>th</sup> drone strike in Syria.

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## **FOREIGN FIGHTERS**

*Undeterred by airstrikes, foreign fighters continue to pour into the conflict zone in Syria and Iraq, bolstering ISIS and representing a potential threat to their home countries—including America—upon return.*

### By the numbers

- More than [25,000 fighters](#) from 100 countries have traveled to Syria and Iraq to join extremists—the largest convergence of Islamist terrorists in world history. U.S. estimates reportedly put its current manpower at 20,000-30,000 members. “We’ve seen no meaningful degradation in their numbers” since last August, [according](#) to a defense official.
- Approximately [4,500](#) Western fighters have traveled to Syria and Iraq.<sup>5</sup> Europol recently assessed that the high-end estimate of EU citizens who left to fight in Syria may have been as high as 5,000 at the beginning of this year.
- An estimated [550](#) Western women have traveled to the conflict zone.

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<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.

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



- More than [250 Americans](#) are estimated to have traveled – or attempted to travel – to Syria to fight. [Several dozen](#) are currently believed to be fighting with ISIS.
- Around [40 American fighters](#) who traveled to Syria have returned to the United States as of March 2015, and several have been arrested on terror charges.
- In addition to fighters joining Sunni extremist groups like ISIS and Jabhat al Nusra in Syria, an estimated [5,000-7,000](#) Lebanese Hezbollah members and other Shi'a militants are fighting alongside the Bashar al Assad regime under Iranian direction.

### Recent Developments

- [August 10](#): Naader Saadeh, a 20-year-old from Rutherford, New Jersey, was charged after he attempted to travel to Syria to join ISIS. Saadeh was part of a cell based in New York and New Jersey that also included his brother and was dismantled in June 2015. Saadeh flew to Amman, Jordan, in May but was detained by authorities there. Saadeh had viewed ISIS propaganda views online and expressed support for the group via his Facebook account.
- [August 8](#): A couple from Starkville, Mississippi, was arrested at the airport after attempting to travel through Turkey to join ISIS in Syria. Jaelyn Delshaun Young, 20, and Muhammad Oda Dakhlalla, 22, expressed their support for ISIS over various social media outlets, including Twitter, and attempted to seek out advice regarding joining ISIS in Syria over the Internet.
- [July 29](#): Arafat Nagi, 42, of Lackawanna, New York, was arrested after pledging allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi and attempting to join the group. Nagi purchased military gear and traveled to Turkey in 2012 and 2014 in attempts to meet with ISIS members. He also traveled to Yemen. Nagi expressed support for ISIS and disseminated its propaganda, including pictures of beheadings, through Twitter.

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

*Islamist terror groups are putting down deeper roots across the Middle East and North Africa. They continue to expand their influence by radicalizing new recruits online and across borders.*

### By the numbers

- ISIS now has a direct presence, affiliates, or groups pledging support in at least 18 countries or territories, including Afghanistan, Algeria, 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>
- ISIS controls 12 cities and towns in Iraq and 13 more in Syria as of early September.<sup>7</sup>

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

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



## Recent Developments

- **ISIS Safe Haven in Syria and Iraq**
  - 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. Pentagon officials have said Iraqi security forces are currently engaged in an "[isolation phase](#)" ahead of an effort to clear ISIS from the city. Iranian-directed Shi'a militias and allied fighters have [focused](#) their operations on surrounding ISIS-controlled Fallujah, which lies 40 miles east of Ramadi. ISIS continues to contest Iraqi forces' control in [Bayji](#) and at the nearby refinery. In northern Iraq, ISIS likely [deployed](#) mustard agent as a chemical weapon against Iraqi Kurdish forces in combat in August.
  - ISIS has maintained its primary stronghold in Iraq, Mosul, despite targeted airstrikes [against](#) its personnel and military assets there. On August 18, an airstrike in this area successfully [eliminated](#) Abu Bakr al Baghdadi's deputy, Fadhil Ahmad al Hayali (Hajji Mutazz).
  - ISIS has largely maintained its grip on territory in northern and central Syria while advancing in parts of southern Syria. It also captured additional terrain in August when it [seized](#) the town of Qaraytain, which is close to a major highway connecting the capital to the Assad regime's northern areas of control. It has reportedly been attempting to [advance](#) further into the capital, Damascus, and surrounding areas held by opposing rebel groups and it continues to contest Syrian Kurdish control over the border town of [Kobani](#).
- **Emerging ISIS Safe Havens and Affiliates**
  - ISIS-affiliated militants are consolidating control in and around Sirte, Libya. A local [uprising](#) supported by Islamist militias there following the killing of a local cleric was put down brutally by ISIS in August. The Libyan government recently called on Arab states to [launch](#) an air campaign against ISIS militants in this area. In June, ISIS was pushed out of the coastal city of [Darnah](#). An estimated [3,000 fighters](#) in Libya are aligned with ISIS. ISIS has reportedly sent fighters in Libya [funding and military trainers](#) since earlier this year.
  - ISIS-aligned militants in Yemen have [expanded](#) their operations and influence amidst the ongoing war there. They are further exacerbating sectarian tensions, including by [launching](#) deadly suicide bombings at mosques in the capital, Sana'a.
- **Al Qaeda Safe Havens and Affiliates**
  - Al Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al Nusra (JN) maintains a significant presence in Syria, including in the northwestern province of Idlib where it recently helped [launch](#) an offensive on a military airport. It recently withdrew from some [positions](#) outside Aleppo where it had been fighting ISIS because it said it did not want to contribute to join US-Turkey efforts to create an ISIS-free safe zone. JN militants attacked U.S.-trained rebels who deployed into Syria in late July. JN has been a prominent force in an anti-Assad regime coalition [supported](#) by Qatar, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia.



- Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) remains “more capable of carrying out larger-scale attacks against the homeland” than ISIS, [according](#) to National Counterterrorism Center director Nicholas Rasmussen. AQAP has found increased room to maneuver in southern and eastern Yemen during the ongoing Saudi-led coalition offensive against Iranian-backed Houthi rebels. In recent weeks, AQAP militants have [targeted](#) the southern Yemeni port city of Aden. They have also reportedly [assisted](#) local Saudi-backed militias fight the Houthis in some areas.
- AQAP recently released a letter purportedly from its chief bomb-maker, Ibrahim al Asiri, [calling](#) on followers to “strike America in its own home and beyond.” The letter was followed by a similar call from an AQAP official, Khaled Batarfi, who [escaped](#) from a Yemeni prison along with several hundred others in April. AQAP leader Qasim al Raymi [pledged](#) allegiance to al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri and called for attacks against American interests in a July statement, his first since taking over command of the group.
- Mullah Akhtar Mansour, the new leader of the al Qaeda-aligned Afghan Taliban, [vowed](#) in a recent message to “carry on jihad until we establish the Islamic state.” Al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri [pledged](#) his allegiance to Mansour shortly thereafter. Mansour, who is [based](#) in Pakistan, appointed Haqqani Network leader Sirajuddin Haqqani his deputy. Taliban officials and supporters recently [convened](#) in Quetta, Pakistan, following disputes over the post-Mullah Omar leadership transition.

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## OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

### *ISIS aggressively exploits social media in order to recruit fighters, disseminate propaganda, and trigger attacks in the West.*

- FBI Director Comey [said](#) in July “ISIL’s M.O. is they broadcast on Twitter, get people to follow them, then move them to Twitter direct messaging while they evaluate whether they’re a potential liaison either to travel or to kill where they are.”
- Attorney General Loretta Lynch said ISIS has attracted more than [20,000](#) 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 recent Homeland Security Committee hearing.
- ISIS pushed out more than [1,700](#) “products,” including videos, photographic reports, and magazines, over social media through the first five months of this year.<sup>8</sup>
- There are an estimated [200,000](#) pro-ISIS messages posted on Twitter every day.
- ISIS released the 10<sup>th</sup> issue of its English-language magazine “Dabiq” in July, urging its followers to launch attacks in the West. It also [praises](#) the ISIS-connected Frenchman who beheaded his boss and attacked a chemical company and [calls on](#) members of the Afghan Taliban to join its ranks.

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<sup>8</sup> National Counterterrorism Center Deputy Director John Mulligan, testimony before the House Homeland Security Committee, June 3, 2015.



***Released Guantanamo Bay extremists continue to return to the fight. Yet the Obama Administration is formulating a broader plan to shutter the detention facility by releasing or transferring the remaining detainees overseas or to prisons on American soil.***

- Secretary of Defense Ashton indicated this month that roughly half of the remaining detainees may be released to another country. The remaining terrorists would need to be [detained](#) somewhere and the Obama Administration is “looking at places in the United States – prisons and other places – to which these people can be moved,” Carter added. Pentagon officials are [conducting](#) site surveys in South Carolina and Kansas as potential locations for the transfers.
- Deputy National Security Advisor Lisa Monaco [said](#) in July that bringing some Guantanamo Bay detainees to American soil is the “only way we’re going to be able to close” the facility and “that’s the way we’re gonna do it.”
- In July, Belgium [arrested](#) two former Guantanamo Bay detainees who were suspected of recruiting for ISIS. Almost [30 percent](#) of released detainees from Guantanamo are known or suspected to have returned to the battlefield.

***The risk of Islamist terrorists exploiting refugee and migrant flows to travel freely and plot attacks in the West remains high.***

- The European Union’s top judiciary official Michele Coninx said she has received [information](#) regarding ISIS fighters blending into the pool of migrants being smuggled into Europe along the Mediterranean coast. In Bulgaria, five men with decapitation videos and ISIS propaganda on their mobile phones were recently detained by authorities after attempting to [cross](#) the border from Macedonia posing as refugees.

***The recent nuclear agreement with Iran is designed to ease sanctions on the world’s leading state sponsor of terror. The accord will provide hundreds of billions of dollars in economic relief and loosen restrictions on its weapons trafficking. Iran continues to support terror operations across the Middle East.***

- The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force (IRGC-QF), which oversees Iran’s global terror networks, and its top commander Qassem Suleimani will receive sanctions relief under the terms of the deal. The IRGC-QF was behind a foiled 2011 [plot](#) to assassinate the Saudi ambassador in what would have been a mass-casualty attack in Washington, DC. The IRGC-QF is also responsible for killing an [estimated](#) 500 American service members in its role overseeing Iran’s terror operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The previous IRGC-QF commander Ahmad Vahidi, who is tied to the 1993 bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, Argentina, will [also](#) receive sanctions relief.
- The Israeli government [announced](#) that rocket attacks from Syria toward Israel on August 20 were launched by operatives from Palestinian Islamic Jihad and were directed by the head of the IRGC-QF’s Palestinian unit Saeed Izaadhi.
- Saudi authorities [arrested](#) a key Saudi Hezbollah terrorist involved in the [Iranian-directed](#) 1996 Khobar Towers attack on U.S. Air Force personnel in Saudi Arabia. The Iranian proxy group



killed 19 American service members and injured almost 400 others during the attack on a residential complex.

- Kuwait's public prosecutor [indicted](#) a group of 25 Kuwaitis and one Iranian citizen for their role in an Iranian- and Hezbollah-affiliated terror cell that possessed an array of weaponry and had received explosives training.
- In late July, officials in Bahrain announced they had [disrupted](#) an Iranian-directed plot to smuggle C4 explosives and automatic weapons into their country, which hosts the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet.