



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

**KEY POINTS**

- **ISIS' global terror campaign in 2015 resulted in the deadliest Islamist terror attacks in America since 9/11 and in Europe since 2004.** The attacks in San Bernardino, California, where 14 people were killed, and Paris, France, where at least 130 people were killed, are among the 72 ISIS-linked attack plots against Western targets. Most recently, an ISIS supporter attempted to murder a Philadelphia policeman in a close-range shooting attack on January 7.
- **Islamist terrorists have been attempting to infiltrate the United States as authorities have uncovered jihadists who were resettled in America through the refugee resettlement program.** Two refugees from Iraq resettled in the U.S. were recently arrested on terror-related charges linked



to ISIS. In November 2015, the House passed the American Security Against Foreign Enemies (SAFE) Act of 2015, with a bipartisan, veto-proof majority. The bill, sponsored by Homeland Security Committee (HSC) Chairman Michael McCaul, would overhaul the security vetting of Iraqi and Syrian refugees being resettled in the United States.

- **The United States faces an unprecedented terror threat level at home due to the continued failure to destroy ISIS.** Law enforcement authorities have arrested nearly 80 individuals in ISIS-related cases in the United States since 2014 – 62 in 2015 alone. There have been 21 ISIS-linked plots to launch attacks in the homeland. Over 80 percent of the post-9/11 homegrown Islamist extremist cases in the United States have occurred or been disrupted since 2009.
- **Sanctuaries for terror recruits are expanding as ISIS and al Qaeda have gone on the offensive.** While Syria remains a key terror recruiting hotspot, global jihadists have been rebuilding strength in Afghanistan and Pakistan while they carve out new safe havens in Libya and Yemen.
- **Foreign fighters are returning from jihadist battlefields in Syria and plotting attacks in the West.** Islamist terrorists returning to the West from Syria, like those involved in the November 2015 Paris attacks, are a surging threat. Legislation sponsored by HSC Border and Maritime Subcommittee Chairman Candice Miller and recently signed into law will enhance the security of the Visa Waiver Program in order to prevent terrorists from entering the United States. HSC Transportation Security Subcommittee Chairman John Katko recently introduced legislation, passed unanimously out of the Foreign Affairs Committee, to help address overseas security screening gaps.
- **Terror detainees released from Guantanamo are continuing to rejoin the fight.** An al Qaeda member released by the Obama Administration in 2012 reportedly resurfaced recently as a member of al Qaeda's affiliate in Yemen and called for attacks against the West.
- **The Iranian regime's unchecked aggression has escalated as it prepares to reap the windfall from impending sanctions relief.** Iran, the world's leading state sponsor of terror, has recently launched rockets near an American aircraft carrier, directed a terror cell in Bahrain, which hosts the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, and conducted illicit ballistic missile tests without facing significant repercussions. On January 7, legislation to address Iran's continued missile and terror programs passed through the Foreign Affairs Committee.

## **HOMEGROWN ISLAMIST EXTREMISM**

*ISIS drove an unprecedented Islamist terror threat tempo in 2015.*

### By the numbers

- Since September 11, 2001, there have been 139 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>

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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.



- Authorities have arrested 79 individuals in the United States – 62 in 2015 alone – in ISIS-related cases. Additionally, three ISIS-linked individuals have been charged in absentia. 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>
- Around 300 Americans and/or U.S.-based individuals are actively spreading ISIS propaganda and engaging with other ISIS-aligned individuals over social media, according to a December 2015 [report](#) by George Washington University’s Program on Extremism.
- FBI Director James Comey estimated late in 2015 that law enforcement authorities have around [900](#) active homegrown extremist cases – the overwhelming majority of which are related to ISIS. Law enforcement authorities have open investigations of suspected ISIS supporters in [all 50 states](#).

### Recent Developments

- [January 7](#): ISIS supporter Edward Archer ambushed and fired 13 shots at a Philadelphia police officer using a stolen police firearm before being arrested. Archer pledged allegiance to ISIS.
- [January 7](#): Sacramento, California-based Islamist extremist Aws Mohammed Younis al Jayab was arrested after lying to authorities about traveling to Syria and fighting alongside terrorist organizations between November 2013 and January 2014. Al Jayab, an Iraqi refugee of Palestinian descent who was resettled in the U.S. from Syria in October 2012, communicated his intention to join terror organizations in Syria over social media. He said he had joined the ranks of Ansar al Islam, a foreign terrorist organization and had communications with an ISIS supporter.
- [January 6](#): Houston, Texas-based ISIS supporter Omar Faraj Saeed al Hardan was arrested for attempting to support ISIS. Hardan, an Iraqi refugee of Palestinian descent who was resettled in the U.S. from Iraq in November 2009, lied to authorities regarding his automatic machine gun training and had associated with ISIS since 2014 and with al Qaeda’s Syrian affiliate Jabhat al Nusra in 2013 and 2014.
- [December 30](#): Rochester, New York-based ISIS supporter Emanuel Lutchman planned to attack a restaurant on New Year’s Eve before being arrested. Lutchman said he received direction from an ISIS operative overseas and also expressed his desire to travel to join ISIS. He recorded a video pledging allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi and claiming responsibility for the planned attack.
- [December 17](#): Harrisburg, Pennsylvania-based ISIS supporter Jalil Ibn Ameer Aziz was arrested for advocating for violence against Americans through social media and facilitating the travel of ISIS recruits overseas. Aziz was storing high-capacity weapon magazines and ammunition in his residence. He used at least 57 Twitter accounts in support of ISIS’s messaging and reposted a list of the names and personal information of 100 American service members with the intent of inciting attacks against them.

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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.



- [December 11](#): Edgewood, Maryland-based ISIS supporter Mohamed Elshinawy was arrested after communicating electronically with ISIS operatives based overseas and accepting funds he believed were from ISIS for the purpose of launching an attack inside the United States. Elshinawy pledged allegiance to ISIS leader al Baghdadi in February 2015 and received \$8,700 he believed was sent from ISIS operatives through Western Union and PayPal.
- [December 11](#): Minneapolis, Minnesota-based ISIS supporter Khaalid Adam Abdulkadir was arrested when he threatened law enforcement authorities after the FBI publically announced the arrest of ISIS recruit Abdirizak Warsame near Minnesota. Abdulkadir had previously communicated with at least two other ISIS-linked recruiters and former Minnesota-area residents.
- [December 9](#): Eagan, Minnesota-based ISIS supporter Abdirizak Mohamed Warsame was arrested after plotting to join ISIS overseas and facilitating the travel of other individuals in a broader ISIS recruitment network operating from Minnesota. The network began watching Islamist extremist propaganda in 2014 after which it began plotting to send members to join ISIS overseas.
- [December 2](#): Two ISIS-linked terrorists, U.S.-born Syed Rizwan Farook and Pakistani national Tashfeen Malik, attacked a holiday party for local government workers at the Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino, California, killing 14 people. Farook's friend, Enrique Marquez Jr., was later [arrested](#) for purchasing the rifles used in the attack and for conspiring with Farook to plot an attack in 2011-2012. The attackers posted a [pledge of allegiance to ISIS's](#) leader on Facebook.

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## ISIS TERROR ATTACK PLOTS AGAINST THE WEST

*ISIS dramatically expanded its war with a concerted campaign to target the West in 2015.*

### By the numbers

- There have been 72 ISIS-linked plots to attack Western targets, including 20 inside in the United States, since 2014.<sup>3</sup> The number of ISIS-linked attack plots grew by nearly three times from 2014 (20) to 2015 (50).<sup>4</sup>

### Recent Developments

- [January 7](#): ISIS supporter Edward Archer ambushed and fired 13 shots at a Philadelphia police officer using a stolen police firearm before being arrested. Archer pledged allegiance to ISIS.
- [January 7](#): An attacker wielding a meat cleaver was shot after attempting to storm a Paris police station. The man was carrying a reproduction of ISIS's flag and a claim of responsibility for the planned attack.

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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.

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- [January 6](#): ISIS is reportedly running an advanced weapons production and training program in its headquarters in Syria designed to help the group launch attacks in Europe and elsewhere.
- [December 30](#): Rochester, New York-based ISIS supporter Emanuel Lutchman planned to attack a restaurant on New Year's Eve before being arrested. Lutchman said he received direction from an ISIS operative overseas and also expressed his desire to travel to join ISIS. He recorded a video pledging allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi and claiming responsibility for the planned attack.
- [December 29](#): Belgian authorities disrupted a New Year's Eve attack plot in Brussels that would reportedly have been similar to the November 2015 Paris conducted by ISIS. Two individuals who were arrested in connection with the plot possessed ISIS propaganda and military-style equipment. A major fireworks celebration was subsequently cancelled by government authorities. Other individuals arrested in relation to this plot have [ties](#) to the Islamist terror organization "Sharia4Belgium."
- [December 15](#): Turkey detained an ISIS-linked Syrian individual near the Turkey-Syria border who was believed to be planning an attack on the U.S. Consulate in Istanbul. Authorities subsequently arrested an additional 11 ISIS-linked suspects involved in the plot. All of the individuals arrested [possessed](#) fake Syrian passports.
- [December 11](#): The head of Germany's domestic intelligence agency said there are 430 Islamist extremists who are deemed "high risk" and could launch an attack "at any time."
- [December 7](#): A U.K. national born in Somalia attacked passengers at a metro station in London with a knife. Muhaydin Mire yelled "This is for Syria!" while launching the attack – a [phrase](#) reportedly used by the November 2015 Paris attackers – and was arrested with imagery related to ISIS and the Paris attacks.
- [December 2](#): Two ISIS-linked radical Islamists, U.S.-born Syed Rizwan Farook and Pakistani national Tashfeen Malik, attacked a holiday party for local government workers at the Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino, California, killing 14 people.
- The European Parliament [warned](#) in December 2015 that its member states "must prepare for the possibility of a chemical or biological attack" launched by ISIS.
- ISIS is leveraging social media and encrypted technologies for recruiting individuals and "[tasking](#) dozens of troubled Americans to kill people." These technologies [facilitate](#) "communications that may not be intercepted, despite judicial orders under the Fourth Amendment." FBI Director James Comey [testified](#) recently that one of the terrorists involved in the May 2015 Garland, Texas, attack exchanged 109 messages with an overseas terror operative the day of the attack. The director [added](#) "We have no idea what he said because those messages were encrypted."

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## FOREIGN FIGHTERS



***Foreign fighters trained on the battlefields of Syria and Iraq have already attacked the West and pose a continuing threat to the United States and our allies.***

By the numbers

- Around [30,000 Sunni fighters](#) from over 100 countries have traveled to Syria and Iraq to join extremists since 2011. By [comparison](#), roughly 5,000 Islamist fighters traveled to Afghanistan during the anti-Soviet fight in the 1980s and around 4,000 fighters flocked to Iraqi battlefields between 2003 and 2007.
- More than [5,000](#) Western passport holders are estimated to have traveled to fight in Syria and Iraq. Approximately [250 Americans](#) have traveled – or attempted to travel – to Syria to fight. [Several dozen](#) were believed to be fighting with ISIS in 2015.
- Up to [20,000](#) Shi'a Islamist militants, including those from Lebanese Hezbollah and Iraqi militias, have also traveled to the conflict zone to fight alongside the Bashar al Assad regime under Iranian direction.

Recent Developments

- British authorities suspect a masked ISIS [executioner](#) featured in a recent propaganda video is Siddharta Dar, a former London resident who was arrested on terrorism charges in 2014 but fled the country while out on bail.
- ISIS's media arm recently released a recruitment video aimed at [Mandarin Chinese](#) speakers.

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

***ISIS and al Qaeda have exploited power vacuums and expanded their sanctuaries across the Middle East and Africa.***

By the numbers

- ISIS 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>5</sup>
- ISIS controls around two dozen cities across Iraq and Syria.<sup>6</sup> It has maintained its core bases in Mosul, Iraq and Raqqa, Syria despite its territorial losses elsewhere. ISIS has held roughly [70 miles](#) of territory along Syria's border with Turkey.

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<sup>5</sup> Data compiled by the Majority Staff of the Homeland Security Committee.

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



- ISIS exploits its control over territory to finance its operations. It reportedly generates nearly [\\$1 billion](#) annually from extortion and taxation. These activities are now believed to its primary source of revenue. ISIS also controls energy resources in its territory and has made more than [\\$500 million](#) from annual oil sales. The Defense Department estimates that ISIS's oil revenue has been decreased by about [30 percent](#) since a coordinated air campaign against energy-related assets under ISIS control.

### Recent Developments

- ISIS Safe Haven in Syria and Iraq
  - ISIS has maintained a grip over its key bases in Raqqa, Syria and Mosul, Iraq, despite losing some territory across the two countries. It continues to hold the Syrian city of Palmyra, which it seized during the summer of 2015.
  - In December 2015, ISIS lost around [80 percent](#) of Ramadi, the capital of Iraq's largely Sunni-populated Anbar province, to Iraqi security forces. The overwhelming majority of the 400,000 people who lived in Ramadi before ISIS's occupation have yet to be [resettled](#) back into the city.
- Emerging ISIS Safe Havens and Affiliates
  - ISIS has established a significant presence in Libya and provided direct support to its affiliate there. It benefits from the ongoing internal conflict in Libya and has consolidated its control over Sirte, a city on the Mediterranean Sea. It has held sway over at least [150 miles](#) along the Mediterranean coastline in Libya. ISIS has [drawn](#) "a flood of foreign recruits and their families" to Sirte. Its officials have touted that the city "will be no less than Raqqa." Approximately 800 of the 3,500 Libyans who traveled to fight in Syria and Iraq have [returned](#) to form the core of the ISIS network in Libya.
  - In late 2014, a Libyan ISIS facilitator who had been trained by al Qaeda in Iraq founder Abu Musab al Zarqawi helped [set up](#) an ISIS outpost in Libya. ISIS reportedly began funneling [money and military trainers](#) to fighters in Libya earlier in 2015. ISIS recently [deployed](#) a senior Iraqi operative who served in Sadaam Hussein's army to Libya to replace a senior leader [killed](#) in a November 2015 U.S. military airstrike.
  - ISIS has continued to [expand](#) its profile in Yemen through its local affiliate, which has claimed responsibility for recent attacks on [local](#) security forces and 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 affiliate Boko Haram has been [expanding](#) its territory in Nigeria and increasing the frequency of its attacks. In 2015, the group [killed](#) nearly 11,000 individuals in attacks across the country.



- ISIS's affiliate in Afghanistan and Pakistan ("Khorasan") has begun "openly fighting the Taliban for the establishment of a [safe haven](#)." Ongoing friction among leaders of the al Qaeda-aligned Taliban has likely [enabled](#) ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K) to draw recruits, launch attacks, and seize territory. An Afghan government official recently described a district in eastern Afghanistan's Nangarhar province as the country's "[ISIS factory](#)." ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K) has between 1,000 and 3,000 [members](#) in Afghanistan. The affiliate is [led](#) by former Tehrik-e Taliban commander Hafiz Saeed Khan.
- ISIS claimed credit for a December 2015 [attack](#) in Dagestan following [calls](#) for its supporters to "wage jihad in the Caucasus." An estimated [2,000](#) fighters from this region – along with up to 5,000 others from Russia and former Soviet territory – have traveled to Syrian and Iraqi battlefields. ISIS leader al Baghdadi formally accepted a pledge of allegiance from followers in Russia's North [Caucasus](#) region in July 2015.
- ISIS's affiliate in the Egyptian Sinai, which bombed a Russian plane in October 2015, [controls](#) territory in the northeast part of the peninsula. On January 7, 2016, an ISIS-linked group claimed credit for an attack in Egypt on Israeli tourists. The Sinai affiliate has attacked Egyptian security forces, Western targets, and government-aligned tribal [militias](#).
- ISIS has been attempting to [expand](#) its reach into Israel and the Palestinian territories. Israeli authorities arrested five Palestinian Israeli citizens [suspected](#) of supporting ISIS and training with weapons in December 2015.
- ISIS-aligned militants have continued to expand their operations in Bangladesh. Their primary targets of terror have been Westerners and the country's Shi'a and other minority Muslim communities. Last month, ISIS [claimed](#) responsibility for the bombing of an Ahmadi Muslim mosque. It also claimed the fall 2015 killings of a [Japanese](#) citizen and an [Italian](#) aid worker. The [U.S. Embassy](#) in Bangladesh has limited the movements of its employees and their families due to the heightened threat environment.
- ISIS is [attempting](#) to gain a foothold in Somalia, although it reportedly has not dedicated significant personnel and resources to its campaign there. Kenyan officials recently said around 200 former al Shabaab fighters who defected to ISIS were operating along Somalia's border with Kenya. ISIS [gained](#) a pledge of allegiance from Somali cleric Abdul Qadir Mumin and some of his followers in October 2015.
- Al Qaeda Safe Havens and Affiliates
  - Al Qaeda continues to plot terror attacks abroad, according to a November 2015 Worldwide Travel Alert [issued](#) by the State Department. It is focused on "survival, regeneration, and [planning](#) and facilitating future attacks," according to a recent DOD assessment.
  - Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) recently released a video message featuring its leader Qasim al Raymi calling for jihad against its "primary enemy" in the United States. AQAP has been exploiting the ongoing war and expanding its territory in Yemen. Most recently, it has attempted to [push](#) farther into southern and central Yemen. The [growth](#) of Iranian-backed rebels





has “provided AQAP with a useful sectarian narrative upon which to build support, allowing it to position itself as a defender of Sunni interests” in Yemen.

- Al Qaeda [remains](#) a threat in Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan where it has been working to [reconstitute](#) its networks and attack capabilities. The al Qaeda-aligned Haqqani Network is the [primary](#) threat to U.S. and coalition forces “and continues to be the most critical enabler of al Qaeda.”
- The al Qaeda-aligned Afghan Taliban has been waging an offensive campaign to seize territory in Afghanistan. Commander of U.S. Forces-Afghanistan General John Campbell [said](#) last month: “If we don't stay engaged here to build [Afghan forces'] capacity to fight this, keep sanctuary down, it's coming back to the homeland.”
- Al Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al Nusra (JN) has maintained a significant presence in northern Syria. Following Russia's intervention, JN won over a significant contingent of [foreign fighters](#) already operating in Syria “who are starting to believe that the global jihadis are the only ones who will fight with them against Assad.”
- Al Qaeda and its supporters are continuing to operate across vast swaths of territory in North Africa. Most recently, al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has been [fostering](#) a proxy terror group in Mali. AQIM and a partner group [claimed](#) responsibility for a November 20, 2015 terror [attack](#) at the Radisson Blue hotel in Bamako, Mali. That attack killed around 20 people, including one American citizen.
- Al Qaeda's Somali affiliate al Shabaab has been attempting to stave off defections to ISIS while [continuing](#) to launch attacks, most recently against Kenyan security forces. A U.S. military official recently said the group “is not a spent force” despite being cleared from major population centers in Somalia. A senior Shabaab leader was killed in a December 2 U.S. military [airstrike](#).

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## **GUANTANAMO BAY DETAINEES**

*The transfers of Guantanamo terror detainees overseas and, potentially, to the homeland threaten Americans and broader U.S. national security interests.*

- The Office of the Director of National Intelligence's (ODNI) most recent [assessment](#) of recidivism among former Guantanamo Bay detainees concluded that 30 percent of detainees released have resumed or are suspected of having returned to jihadist activity. Between [March](#) and [September](#) 2015, an additional 11 former detainees were assessed to have returned to the battlefield.
- A long-time Sudanese al Qaeda member with ties to Osama bin Laden – [released](#) by the Obama Administration from Guantanamo in 2012 – has apparently joined AQAP. The former terror detainee, Ibrahim Qosi, [appeared](#) in a recent propaganda video urging al Qaeda followers to launch attacks in the West.



- The Obama Administration [recently released](#) two Yemenis and one Kuwaiti from Guantanamo Bay, transferring them to the governments of Ghana and Kuwait, respectively. There are now 104 detainees left at the terror detention facility.
  - A former Guantanamo Bay terrorist detainee, Abdul Rahim Muslim Dost, is reportedly [recruiting](#) on behalf of ISIS. Dost was affiliated with the Pakistani Taliban following his release and is now a key [deputy](#) to the head of ISIS's affiliate in Afghanistan and Pakistan.
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## **TERRORISTS' EXPLOITATION OF REFUGEE FLOWS**

*Islamist terrorists have [infiltrated the United States in the past](#) through refugee programs and [are attempting to do so again](#). ISIS has already exploited refugee and migrant flows to infiltrate and attack the West. The Obama Administration's proposal to resettle significant numbers of Syrian refugees in the U.S. would have minimal impact on the refugee crisis but a potentially major impact on our homeland security.*

- 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 FBI announced on January 7 the arrests of two Islamist extremists in [Texas](#) and [California](#), including one linked to ISIS, who arrived in the U.S. through the refugee resettlement program in 2009 and 2012.
  - German authorities [arrested](#) a Syrian refugee suspected of having ties to ISIS. The individual entered Germany with his family in early December. A German interior ministry official said the problem with refugee screening processes "is of course that these databases are very much [incomplete](#)."
  - Austrian authorities [arrested](#) two individuals at a refugee shelter who are suspected of having ties to the November 2015 ISIS attacks in Paris. The individuals are from Algeria and Pakistan but entered Europe via Greece using fake Syrian passports.
  - The Obama administration has [proposed](#) resettling at least 10,000 more Syrian refugees in the U.S. this fiscal year, in addition to more than 2,300 already resettled since 2011. Law enforcement and intelligence officials have repeatedly [indicated](#) 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.
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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.*



- Iran's IRGC naval forces [fired](#) a rocket during a live-fire exercise that came within 1,500 yards of the USS Harry S. Truman, an American aircraft carrier operating in international waters in the Strait of Hormuz. U.S. military officials said the firing was "unnecessarily provocative and unsafe."
- Bahrain announced it foiled Iranian-sponsored bombing [plots](#) after it discovered a network of operatives being run by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and Lebanese Hezbollah.
- The Obama Administration will reportedly begin [easing](#) sanctions on Iran early this year, [despite](#) the limited cooperation Iran provided to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Iran's continuing support for terrorism, and its recent illicit ballistic missile tests. The White House [recently](#) reversed a decision to issue sanctions designations in response to Iran's ballistic missile threat, citing a delay. In November 2015, Iran conducted another medium-range ballistic [missile test](#) in violation of its international commitments.