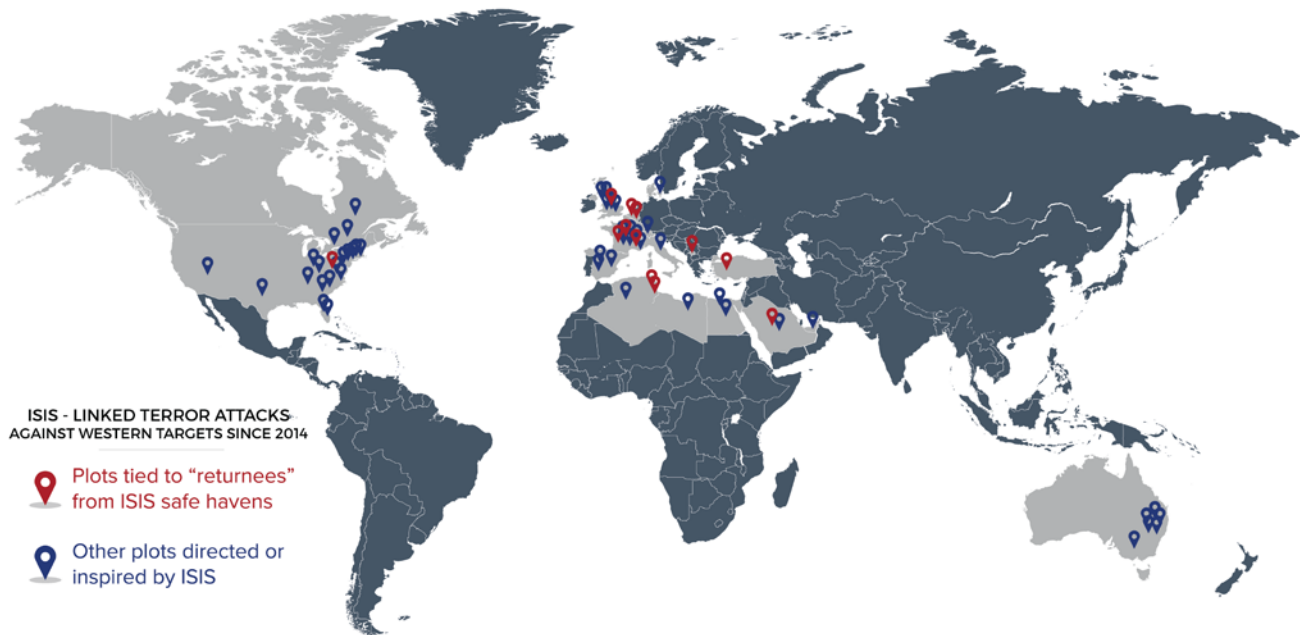




## ISIS ATTACK PLOTS AGAINST WESTERN TARGETS



**61**  
TOTAL  
ISIS ATTACK PLOTS  
AGAINST WESTERN  
TARGETS

**17**  
ATTACK PLOTS  
OF THE 61 WERE  
IN THE USA



**2X**  
AMOUNT  
ISIS ATTACK  
PLOTS IN 2015  
THAN IN 2014



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

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Despite nearly 14 months of airstrikes, the United States and its allies have failed to roll back ISIS. In fact, the group has largely maintained its core terrorist safe havens in Syria and Iraq while expanding its global footprint.** ISIS kept its grip on Iraq's Anbar province as the counter-offensive to take back the key city of Ramadi was put on "operational pause." Its affiliates in Afghanistan, Egypt, Libya, and the Caucasus showed their growing strength by launching attacks or targeting local security forces over the past month.
- **ISIS's global campaign has fueled attacks against Western targets at an unprecedented pace.** As of early October, the group has inspired or directed 61 terror attack plots against Western targets, including 17 in the United States. There have been more than twice as many ISIS-linked attack plots against Western targets in 2015 (41) than in 2014 (20). Now officials have expressed concern that ISIS may be exploiting refugee flows to enter the West undetected.



- **Al Qaeda affiliates from Syria to Yemen have also carved out sanctuary and continue to threaten the U.S. homeland.** Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula reiterated a call for its followers in the West to launch attacks in their home countries, while the al Qaeda-aligned Taliban attempted to seize a key city in northern Afghanistan.
  - **The homegrown Islamist extremist threat in the United States 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 Islamist extremists has gone from 38 in July 2010 to 127 today—more than a three-fold increase in just five years.
  - **Concerted efforts to stem the flow of Americans and others traveling to join jihadists overseas have largely failed.** The House Homeland Security Committee’s bipartisan Foreign Fighter Task Force [found](#) that authorities have only managed to stop a tiny fraction of the hundreds of aspiring U.S. jihadists from leaving the country to join terrorists abroad. Moreover, the U.S. government lacks a strategy for combating terrorist travel, and glaring security gaps overseas are putting the American homeland in danger.
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## **HOMEGROWN ISLAMIST EXTREMISM**

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

### 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 – 70 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>
- 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. FBI Director James Comey has said 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

- [September 17](#): Ali Saleh, 22, was arrested in Queens, New York, after repeated attempts to travel and join ISIS overseas. He interacted with ISIS facilitators via Twitter and [told](#) investigators he was

<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.



initially attracted to ISIS “because they were having the most success” against the Assad regime in Syria.

- [September 11](#): Joshua Ryne Goldberg, 20, was arrested in Orange Park, Florida, after attempting to direct a recruit to build a pressure cooker bomb and emplace it at a 9/11 commemoration memorial in Kansas City, Missouri. Goldberg [had](#) encouraged attacks on the Muhammad cartoon contest in Garland, Texas, which was targeted by two ISIS-linked terrorists and claimed by the group.
- [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.
- [August](#): Law enforcement authorities arrested an ISIS-inspired 15-year-old boy near Philadelphia who wanted to conduct an attack on Pope Francis using multiple operatives, firearms, and explosives. The individual used social media to share explosives-making instructions he obtained.

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

*ISIS’s global campaign has fueled attacks against Western targets at an unprecedented pace.*

### By the numbers

- Since early 2014, there have been 61 planned or executed ISIS-linked attack plots against Western targets, including 17 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 (41) than in 2014 (20).<sup>4</sup>

### Recent Developments

- [October 1](#): Israel’s domestic security agency announced the arrest of a seven-man, ISIS-supporting terror cell plotting attacks on military and police personnel in Nazareth.
- [September 18](#): French officials said they had recently arrested a French national who traveled to ISIS’s stronghold in Raqqa, Syria, and was suspected of planning an attack during a concert. The individual possessed a handgun and had previously not been on French authorities’ radar. He had also reportedly traveled with a suspected Moroccan jihadist who was detained on a Spanish arrest warrant in Poland earlier this year.

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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.



- [September 11](#): As noted above, Joshua Ryne Goldberg was arrested in Florida after attempting to direct a recruit to bomb a 9/11 memorial event in Missouri.
  - [August](#): As noted above, an ISIS-inspired 15-year-old boy was arrested in Pennsylvania in connection with a plot to target the Pope during his visit to the United States.
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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

- 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.
- 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.
- 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. Jones has been in Syria since 2013 and was married to [recently](#) killed ISIS hacker and recruiter Junaid Hussain. 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).
- 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 [20,000](#) Shi’a fighters, including from Lebanese Hezbollah and Iraqi militias, fighting alongside the Bashar al Assad regime under Iranian direction.

### Recent Developments

- [September 17](#): As noted above, Ali Saleh was arrested in New York after repeated attempts to travel and join ISIS overseas.

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



- [August 24](#): As noted above, Ahmed Mohammed El Gammal was arrested in Arizona for assisting an individual travel to Syria to receive military training from ISIS.
  - A group of English-speaking women based in Libya have been actively recruiting jihadists to migrate there via social media platforms and encrypted messaging applications, [according](#) to a study conducted by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue. The women are believed to be from the U.K. and have advertised Libya as an easier destination to reach than Syria.
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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 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>
- ISIS controls 12 cities and towns in Iraq and 13 more in Syria.<sup>7</sup>

### 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 2015. Iraqi security forces have been in an "[isolation phase](#)" ahead of an attempt to clear ISIS from the city. However, a Pentagon spokesman said on October 1 that the effort is on "[pause](#)" and that the local security forces still lack the capabilities to retake the city. Iranian-directed Shi'a militias and allied fighters are [focusing](#) their operations on surrounding ISIS-controlled Fallujah, which lies 40 miles east of Ramadi. ISIS continues to conduct suicide bombing attacks in [Baghdad](#).
  - ISIS has maintained its primary stronghold in Iraq, Mosul, despite targeted airstrikes [against](#) its personnel and military assets there. A September 10 airstrike west of Mosul successfully [eliminated](#) ISIS senior leader Abu Bakr al Turkmani.
  - 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] militias and their commanders acting with impunity undermine the campaign against ISIS and put all civilians at greater risk," according to a recent [study](#) by Human Rights Watch.

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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.



- ISIS has largely maintained its grip on territory over the last month in northern and central Syria while advancing in parts of southern Syria. In September it [reportedly](#) seized the last oil field that had been held by the Assad regime. ISIS fighters captured additional terrain in August when they [seized](#) the town of Qaraytain, which is close to a major highway connecting the capital, Damascus, to the Assad regime's northern areas of control. ISIS seized the city of Palmyra in May 2015; it continues to destroy [historical](#) sites there.
- ISIS has not been a primary [target](#) for Russian airstrikes that commenced on September 30. Russia's military intervention will likely "take the form of indiscriminate attack against [the Assad regime's] opponents" and as a consequence "unify the Syrian opposition with the jihadists against the Russians and Assad," according to an [assessment](#) by non-government analysts. Russia has begun [targeting](#) areas that have been under the control of Syrian rebels who received support from the United States.
- Emerging ISIS Safe Havens and Affiliates
  - ISIS-affiliated militants have maintained and consolidated their control over Sirte, Libya. ISIS fighters in Libya have attacked a key oil [terminal](#), targeted a [prison](#) in Tripoli, and [kidnapped](#) several individuals in recent weeks. Tunisian authorities [seized](#) multiple car bombs and ISIS-linked material crossing from Libya into Tunisia on October 1. 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-aligned militants in Yemen have [expanded](#) their operations and influence over the last several months amidst the ongoing war there. They are further exacerbating sectarian tensions, including by [launching](#) deadly suicide bombings at mosques in the capital, Sana'a. A group that included a Saudi [national](#) began liaising with ISIS and establishing support for it in Yemen in 2014. ISIS cells have also been operating in neighboring Saudi Arabia. Saudi authorities recently [targeted](#) an ISIS cell in the capital, Riyadh, and another eastern city suspected of being involved in a August 2015 mosque suicide bombing.
  - ISIS-aligned militants in Afghanistan [launched](#) an attack against Afghan security forces in eastern Afghanistan's Nangarhar province on September 29. ISIS's affiliate in Afghanistan and Pakistan ("Khorasan") consists 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. This affiliate reportedly [operates](#) out of the Tirah valley region in Pakistan's western tribal region.
  - ISIS's affiliate in the Caucasus [claimed](#) an attack on a Russian army barracks in southern Dagestan on September 3. This attack is its first since June 2015 when ISIS leader al Baghdadi formally accepted a pledge of allegiance from followers in Russia's North [Caucasus](#) region. 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. For example, one local militant



commander, Tarkhan Ismailovich Gaziyez, [deployed](#) to Syria via Turkey to command the ISIS-linked group Tarkhan Jammal.

- ISIS's established affiliate in Egypt's Sinai has continued [attacking](#) Egyptian security forces and Western targets. Four U.S. soldiers were [injured](#) in Sinai on September 3 when their convoy drove over two improvised explosive devices. There are approximately [725](#) American service members deployed there as part of a multinational peacekeeping force. ISIS's Sinai branch has also [targeted](#) Israel in the past. An Israel Defense Forces commander recently [said](#) "It's clear that there will be a terror attack against Israel [from ISIS in Sinai]...I believe it will happen during my tenure." Egyptian security forces [launched](#) an operation in September attempting to weaken Islamist militants in the Sinai.
- An ISIS-linked Islamist terror group operating in Indonesia, Mujahidin Indonesian Timur (MIT), "has [become](#) increasingly bold in its attacks on [local] security forces, which includes the use of explosives and shootings." Separately, ISIS has used recruiting, fundraising, and travel facilitation [networks](#) based in Indonesia. The [head](#) of the jihadist group Jemma Anshorut Tauhid pledged allegiance and directed support to ISIS beginning in 2014.
- ISIS supporters claimed responsibility for the September 28 killing of an Italian aid worker in Dhaka, Bangladesh. They released a message [threatening](#) attacks against citizens of countries supporting the anti-ISIS coalition: "We say to all citizens of the Crusader coalition, you will not be safe in the Muslim lands, and this is just the beginning."
- An ISIS-aligned group based in the Gaza Strip, the Sheikh Omar Hadid Brigade, [claimed](#) credit for rocket attacks on Israel on October 4.
- Al Qaeda Safe Havens and Affiliates
  - Al Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al Nusra (JN) maintains a significant presence in northern Syria, including in the northwestern province of Idlib where it helped [seize](#) a military airport in late August from the Assad regime. JN has [attacked](#) and [intimidated](#) U.S. military-trained New Syrian Forces, most recently forcing them to hand over trucks and ammunition issued by the United States. 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 released a letter in August 2015 purportedly from its chief bomb-maker, Ibrahim al Asiri, [calling](#) on followers to "strike America in its own home and beyond." AQAP has [expanded](#) its presence in southern and eastern Yemen during the ongoing Saudi-led coalition offensive against Iranian-backed Houthi rebels. AQAP has also undertaken a concerted effort to [co-opt](#) and leverage the influence of Sunni tribes in Yemen.
  - AQAP [released](#) the 14<sup>th</sup> edition of its online magazine "Inspire." The publication includes a general call for its followers in the West to conduct attacks in their home countries and also encourages them to kill prominent businesspeople in the United States in order to destabilize the

economy. AQAP also used the issue to advise supporters how to prepare for an attack and to provide instructions for making a hand grenade.

- The al Qaeda-aligned Afghan Taliban attacked and seized Kunduz, a key city in northern Afghanistan, on September 28. An estimated [3,000-strong](#) force took control of government buildings and major roads in the first Taliban takeover of a city since 2001. Afghan military forces supported by U.S. forces are [attempting](#) to recapture and secure the city. They appear to have [gained](#) ground from the militants, but continue to face resistance inside Kunduz and in the surrounding areas. A senior Taliban member said following the [assault](#): “Until Kunduz, we were fighting a defensive guerrilla war...Now we will incessantly be on the offensive, to take more and more territory.” Nearly all of the remaining 9,800 American troops in Afghanistan will be [withdrawn](#) by the end of 2016 under President Obama’s existing drawdown plan; a limited contingent of troops is expected to remain based at Embassy Kabul.
- An al Qaeda explosives expert, French national David Drugeon, was recently [confirmed](#) to have been killed in an airstrike near Aleppo, Syria. Drugeon was part of a cell of veteran al Qaeda operatives in Syria plotting external attacks (the Khorasan Group).

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## OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

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

- ISIS 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 Homeland Security Committee hearing. There are an estimated [200,000](#) pro-ISIS messages posted on Twitter every day.
- ISIS is leveraging social media and encrypted technologies for operational planning. As FBI Director Comey [explained](#) in July 2015: “ISIL 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 released the 11<sup>th</sup> issue of its English-language magazine “Dabiq” in September. The issue highlighted its affiliates’ global operations, primarily in Egypt and in Libya. ISIS also criticized al Qaeda and announced it is taking ransom payments for two hostages from China and Norway.

***Released Guantanamo Bay extremists continue to return to the fight. The Obama Administration has vowed to continue transferring detainees out of the facility and to eventually shutter it despite this trend.***

- The Office of the Director of National Intelligence’s (ODNI) updated [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. Since the last [report](#) issued in March 2015, 11 more detainees were believed to have returned to the battlefield.

- The Obama Administration released Younis Abdurrahman [Chekkouri](#) and Abdul [Shalabi](#) to Morocco and Saudi Arabia, respectively. There are 114 detainees left at the facility.
- Secretary of Defense Ashton indicated in September 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.

***The risk of Islamist terrorists exploiting refugee and migrant flows to travel freely and plot attacks in the West remains high. The Obama Administration has proposed dramatically increase the resettlement of refugees who have fled the jihadist epicenter in Syria.***

- The Obama administration has [proposed](#) resettling at least 10,000 more Syrian refugees in the U.S. this coming fiscal year, in addition to nearly 1,600 already resettled.
- Director of National Intelligence Gen. (ret.) James Clapper [said](#) on September 9: “As [Syrian refugees] descend on Europe, one of the obvious issues that we worry about, and in turn as we bring refugees into this country, is exactly what’s their background? We don’t obviously put it past the likes of ISIL to infiltrate operatives among these refugees...That is a huge concern of ours.”
- American officials have previously 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 refugees for resettlement. FBI Assistant Director Michael [said](#) earlier this year “the concern in Syria is that we don’t have systems in places on the ground to collect the information...All of the data sets, the police, the intel services that normally you would go and seek that information [from], don’t exist.”
- The head of Germany’s domestic security agency (BfV) Hans-Georg Maassen [said](#) on September 22, 2015, “We are very concerned that Islamists in Germany are trying, under the cover of humanitarian assistance, to exploit the situation of the refugees for their own ends and to proselytize and recruit among asylum-seekers.”
- Lebanon’s Education Minister [said](#) on September 14, 2015, he believed that ISIS is facilitating its operatives’ infiltration into Europe using refugee flows.
- Bulgarian authorities [said](#) they arrested five Albanians suspected of ISIS links after they attempted to illegally cross the Macedonia-Bulgaria border in late August. Bulgaria shares a border with Turkey, which has been the key pipeline for fighters going into and out of Syria.

***The 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.***



- Iran has reportedly released several senior al Qaeda operatives. The [terrorists](#) “were believed to be still in Iran but there are fears that they will be allowed to leave - probably to refill positions inside al Qaeda's leadership structure that has been mauled by drone attacks in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria and Somalia.” In 2013, the former head of al Qaeda’s facilitation network in Iran, Abdul Mohsen Abdullah Ibrahim al Sharikh, [relocated](#) to Syria to take up a senior leadership role with al Qaeda’s Syrian affiliate Jabhat al Nusra. Iran and al Qaeda have an official agreement under which the Iranian regime [gives](#) a network of al Qaeda leaders in Iran “freedom of operation and uninhibited ability to travel for extremists and their families.”
- Authorities in Bahrain [uncovered](#) a network with suspected links to Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force (IRGC-QF) in September. The network had set up a facility for manufacturing bombs and possessed 1.5 tons of high-grade explosives material. Bahrain hosts the U.S. Navy’s Fifth Fleet headquarters.
- The Saudi Arabian-led military coalition in Yemen [seized](#) an Iranian boat off the coast of Oman carrying anti-tank shells and missiles that it believed was destined for the Iranian-backed al Houthi rebels.
- Iran is reportedly [escalating](#) its involvement in Syria by deploying additional military personnel in advance of an operation against anti-Assad regime forces that will include Russia, Syria, Iran, Lebanese Hezbollah, and Iraqi militias.