



## THE PERSISTENT TERROR THREAT TO THE UNITED STATES

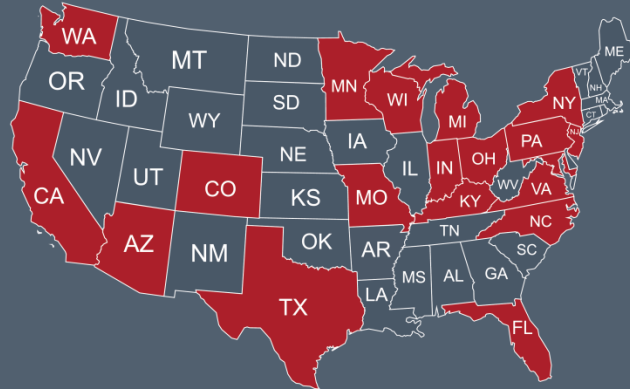
So far in 2016 & 2017...

**39 HOMEGROWN JIHADIST  
CASES** in...

**19 STATES** for...

California, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia,  
Washington, New York, Florida, Indiana, Arizona, North Carolina, Kentucky,  
New Jersey, Maryland, Wisconsin, Ohio, Colorado, District of Columbia

- ✓ PLOTS TO ATTACK
- ✓ OVERSEAS TRAVEL
- ✓ FINANCIAL SUPPORT
- ✓ LYING TO AUTHORITIES
- ✓ WEAPONS CHARGES

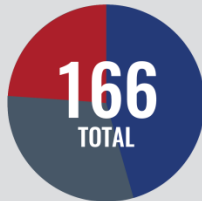


*In just the past few years, we have seen an unprecedented “spike” in the homegrown terror threat, primarily driven by the rise of ISIS.*



### ISIS-LINKED PLOTS TO ATTACK THE WEST

(2014-Present)



- **69** IN EUROPE
- **36** IN THE U.S.
- **61** TARGETING WESTERNERS OUTSIDE U.S./EUROPE

\*See note in report regarding methodology changes

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*This document is produced by the Majority Staff of the House Homeland Security Committee. It is based on information culled from open source materials, including media reports, publicly available government statements, and nongovernmental assessments.*



## KEY POINTS

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- ◆ Although ISIS faces continued counterterrorism pressure in its key safe havens, the group's external operations plotting appears undiminished. The New Year opened with a deadly ISIS-linked attack on a nightclub in Istanbul, Turkey, leaving 39 dead and demonstrating the terror group's continued ability to inspire and organize major attacks.
- ◆ European nations are moving forward with counterterrorism reforms designed to cope with the surging terror threat. Yet despite improvements, the continent still suffers from major security weaknesses that make European countries more vulnerable to attack and put U.S. interests overseas at risk.
- ◆ On the home front, ISIS and radical Islamist ideology may have played a part in inspiring an attack this month on travelers at a Ft. Lauderdale airport by Esteban Santiago, a mentally disturbed gunman who has been charged with murdering five people in the attack.

## HOMEGROWN ISLAMIST EXTREMISM

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- ◆ Authorities continue to track a high number of homegrown terror plots in the United States, and the number of cases since 9/11 is nearing a historic milestone: There have been nearly 200 total homegrown jihadist cases in the United States since 9/11 (the figure currently stands at 193), a majority having taken place in just the past few years.<sup>1</sup>

## Recent Developments

- ◆ [January 31, 2017](#): Joshua Cummings, age 37, shot and [killed](#) Denver RTD contract security officer. Upon arrest, jihadist materials were found in Cummings' backpack. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) had previously been [warned](#) of his radicalization. A December 24, 2016 letter to DHS warns that Cummings had attended a lunch for converts to Islam, and that he felt it acceptable to fight in order ["to establish the rule of Islam."](#) He was [arrested](#) without incident approximately 20 minutes after the shooting.
- ◆ [January 6, 2017](#): [Esteban Santiago](#), 26-year-old former member of the Puerto Rico and Alaska National Guard, who had previously served in Iraq, killed five when he opened fire on Ft. Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport. Santiago said the attack was executed on [behalf of ISIS](#). He previously received a [mental health evaluation](#) by the FBI, claimed to hear voices and said his [mind](#) was being controlled by a United States intelligence agency. The FBI confiscated his gun, but it was later returned to him. Santiago carried out the attack with a gun that was [legally](#) checked in his luggage.

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<sup>1</sup> This figure is lower than what was reported in the Committee's January *Terror Threat Snapshot* (229 homegrown jihadist cases) because of a change in methodology. Previously, Committee staff counted individual jihadist arrests and attacks, but cases are now grouped on an "incident" basis, e.g. a terror cell is counted as "one" homegrown jihadist case, rather than as a tally of the various arrests associated with that cell. These figures are based on open-source data compiled and analyzed by the Majority Staff of the Homeland Security Committee.



## ISIS TERROR PLOTS AGAINST THE WEST

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- ◆ Since 2014, there have been at least 166 ISIS-linked plots or attacks against Western targets, including four known plots in January, two of which were thwarted.<sup>2</sup>

### Recent Developments

- ◆ January 20, 2017: Austrian Special Forces arrested a 17-year-old for allegedly plotting a terror attack in Vienna. The lead on the plot came from foreign intelligence services. Austrian Interior Minister Wolfgang Sobotka said the suspect claimed his support for ISIS. The next day, police in Germany arrested a second man, 21, linked to the Vienna arrest. In the ongoing hunt for the first suspect's associates, Austrian police have warned Vienna residents to remain on alert, and the Interior Minister noted there were "several connecting lines" between the young man and other potential suspects both in Austria and Germany. Spokesman for Austrian Interior Ministry Karl-Heinz Grundboeck said the suspect has allegedly been in contact with radical "Albanian-Islamist" circles. Another spokesman for the prosecutor's office in Dusseldorf reported the teen had stayed with the 21-year-old in Neuss, and that plans to attack German armed forces were also discussed.
- ◆ January 13, 2017: Spanish police arrested two ISIS-linked suspects in Ceuta, Spain's North African enclave. While details on the identities of the detainees were not disclosed, according to police, the two suspects had formed a group that was plotting terror activities.
- ◆ January 2, 2017: A Syrian asylum-seeker was arrested in Saarbrücken, Germany for requesting 180,000 euros from ISIS to buy and repaint vehicles that could be outfitted with explosives and driven into crowds. The 38-year-old assailant arrived in Germany in late 2014 and admitted his contact with ISIS.
- ◆ January 1, 2017: An attack claimed by ISIS left 39 people dead in a popular Istanbul nightclub amidst New Year's celebrations. Shortly after midnight on New Year's Day, Abdulkadir Masharipov shot at the crowd of 600 in the popular Reina nightclub. The victims included at least 27 foreigners hailing from 14 different countries, including one Canadian. One American was among the injured. The shooting occurred days after a pro-ISIS group, the Nashir Media Foundation, called for attacks on clubs, markets, and movie theatres. Masharipov, an Uzbek national, was not apprehended until January 17, 2017, when he was caught in a police raid on the home of a friend in Istanbul's Esenyurt suburb. As of early January, at least 36 people are being held in connection to the attack, including two Chinese citizens, who allegedly were linked to the attack. In a January interview, Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmus claimed an intelligence organization was involved in the attack. He stated, "It appears the Reina attack is not just a terrorist organization's act, but

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<sup>2</sup> This figure is higher than what was reported in the Committee's January *Terror Threat Snapshot* (145 ISIS-linked plots against the West) primarily because of a change in methodology. Previously, Committee staff did not include individual Western hostage cases in Syria and Iraq as terror plots, but those ISIS-related incidents are now being counted as part of the total. These figures are based on open-source data compiled and analyzed by the Majority Staff of the Homeland Security Committee.



there was also an intelligence organization involved. It was an extremely planned and organized act."

## **THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST ISLAMIST TERROR**

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### ***ISIS***

#### **Operations Against ISIS Territory**

- ◆ On January 24, 2017, Iraqi officials announced eastern Mosul's liberation after 100 days of fierce combat. Iraqi security forces now control all areas within the city to the east of the Tigris River, and along the east bank, Mosul University, and the Ninevah Ruins. Security forces have been fighting to oust ISIS from Mosul with assistance from coalition airstrikes and Peshmerga forces. While commanding general of Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve Army Lt. General Stephen J. Townsend praised the offensive's success as a "monumental achievement," he noted a tough road ahead in the fight against ISIS. "There is still a long way to go before ISIL is completely eliminated from Iraq, and the fight for western Mosul is likely to be even tougher than the eastern side," he said "But the [Iraqis] have proven they are both a professional and formidable fighting force, and I have every confidence that ISIL's days are numbered in Iraq."
- ◆ Alarmingly, after the liberation of east Mosul, a spokesperson for Iraqi counterterrorism forces said Iraqi forces found a "bomb factory" set up at Mosul University, along with large amounts of what is suspected to be chemical substances.
- ◆ Iraqi forces also found over a dozen surface-to-surface rockets containing Russian inscriptions, along with a mustard chemical warfare agent at a site in liberated eastern Mosul. The site contained a tank of mustard agent and a warehouse holding the surface-to-air rockets. Iraqi special forces Brigadier General Haider Fadhil noted the discovery of these specific types of rockets suggests ISIS' was trying to use the chemical agent as a weapon.
- ◆ Since the Syrian Democratic Forces and the Syrian Arab Coalition initiated efforts to free Raqqa began on November 5, 2016, they have liberated 3,172 square kilometers of land, including the area east of the Euphrates and are presently within five kilometers of Tabaqah Dam.
- ◆ After losing Syria's ancient city of Palmyra to Syrian, Iranian, and Russian forces in March 2016, ISIS militants regained control of the city on December 10, 2016, leading to the return of over 4,000 militants. According to a January 20, 2017 statement from the Syrian Directorate General for Antiquities and Museums, ISIS members are renewing destruction efforts, including the demolition of part of Palmyra's historic Roman amphitheater. On January 19, 2017, ISIS executed 12 civilians in Palmyra.
- ◆ U.S. precision airstrikes in Libya continue as Defense Secretary Ash Carter estimated over 80 ISIS fighters were killed on January 19, 2017 during an overnight attack on the terror



group's training camps near Sirte. The U.S., its partners, and Libya's Government of National Accord worked together to eliminate many fighters who had arrived at the camps after fleeing Sirte last month in an operation to clear ISIS militants from their strongholds. Secretary Carter noted that some fighters were planning attacks in Europe.

### **ISIS Sanctions**

- ◆ On January 10, 2017, the Department of State designated Alexanda Amon Kotey as a Specifically Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT). Kotey, a British national, is member of ISIS and a four-person execution cell dubbed "The Beatles." He acted as a guard for the cell, which was once run by the deceased and notorious "Jihadi John" (SDGT Mohammed Emwazi). Kotey is also accused of capturing and beheading around two dozen hostages. Several Westerners were among these hostages, including American journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff, and American aid worker Peter Kassig. Kotey is responsible for recruiting British nationals to join ISIS, and he remains at large in Syria. In addition to Emwazi and Kotey, "the Beatles" were comprised of British citizens Aine Davis and El Shafee Elsheikh.

### **Notable ISIS Members Targeted**

- ◆ January 8, 2017: A member of ISIS' senior leadership council, Abu Anas al-Iraqi, was killed in a raid while traveling to Raqqa. Al-Iraqi had been involved in Al Qaeda in Iraq, and was notably in Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's inner circle.

### **Recent Non-Western ISIS Attacks**

- ◆ January 17, 2017, a Nigerian fighter jet mistakenly bombed a refugee camp in an attempt to attack Boko Haram fighters. Boko Haram, who pledged allegiance to ISIS in March 2015, attacked the same refugee camp in Nigeria on January 19, 2017 while aid workers were trying to help victims of the airstrike.
- ◆ January 13, 2017: Two female suicide bombers carrying two infants detonated their devices after passing through a vigilante checkpoint in Madagali, Nigeria, killing themselves, two babies, and four others. Holding infants, they were mistaken for civilians and were permitted through the checkpoint. Boko Haram is widely suspected of having carried out the attack. While the group has previously used female attackers, officials warn that the use of babies in attacks could become a trend.

## ***AL QAEDA***

### **Operations Against AQ Territory**

- ◆ January 28, 2017: In Syria, Islamist factions formed an alliance in an effort to bolster the opposition in the fight against Bashar al-Assad. The joined forces are comprised of Jabhat



Fateh al-Sham (formerly Al Nusra Front), the Nour al-Din al-Zinki group, Liwa al-Haqq, Jaish al-Sunna and Jabhat Ansar al-Din.

- ◆ January 28, 2017: A raid in Yemen targeting Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) ended with 14 AQAP fighters killed. Unfortunately, the raid also saw the death of a U.S. Navy sailor, and the wounding of three other U.S. servicemen. Pentagon spokesman Navy Capt. Jeff Davis reported intelligence was gathered from the raid that will further understanding of the group which could ultimately prevent attacks. Both the young daughter and brother-in-law of Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-born AQAP cleric killed in a 2011 drone strike, were purportedly killed. Al-Awlaki's brother-in-law is a leader of AQAP.
- ◆ January 19, 2017: One-hundred Al Qaeda members were killed by a U.S. airstrike against a training camp in Syria. The Shaykh Sulayman training camp located in Syria's Idlib province had been in operation since at least 2013, according to Pentagon spokesman Navy Capt. Jeff Davis. Davis also noted that more than 150 Al Qaeda fighters had been killed by U.S. strikes since January 1, 2017 alone.

### **Recent AQ Attacks**

- ◆ January 25, 2017: Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for a hotel attack in Mogadishu, Somalia. Militants rammed a car bomb into the gate of the Dayah Hotel, a popular destination for politicians. Fighters entered the hotel, and a second bomb was detonated shortly afterward. Twenty-eight were confirmed killed and 43 injured.
- ◆ January 18, 2017: Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb's (AQIM) Mali branch, Al Mourabitoun, claimed responsibility for a suicide car bombing at a military camp in Gao, Mali that killed 47. The camp holds both government forces and armed groups meant to carry out joint patrols based on a 2012 peace deal.

### **THE TALIBAN**

- ◆ The Taliban threat has proven resilient and powerful in Afghanistan. According to an Afghan Defense Ministry official, the group is responsible for nearly 19,000 attacks throughout the country in just the past 10 months. Throughout that time, however, Afghan National Security Forces only carried out approximately 700 counter-insurgency operations.
- ◆ The group made it a bloody January in Afghanistan. The country's worsening security situation became clear when the Taliban claimed bombings across the country, killing dozens in a single day.
- ◆ January 10, 2017: The Taliban carried out a double bombing in Kabul during the early evening rush hour. The two bombs were situated near the Afghan Parliament office compound, killing 38 and wounding 72. The American University of Afghanistan is located near the site of the attack, but the University stated that no staff were harmed.



- ◆ January 10, 2017: In Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand Province, at least seven were killed and six injured at a guesthouse used by an intelligence official that was targeted by a Taliban suicide bomber.
- ◆ January 11, 2017: A video was released by the Taliban with two captured teachers from the American University of Kabul in what seems to be a “proof of life.” United States citizen Kevin King, and Australian citizen Timothy Weeks appear in a video apparently recorded on January 1, 2017 explaining their capture near the University in early August, and begging for now-President Trump to negotiate a prison swap and secure their release.

### ***GUANTANAMO BAY***

- ◆ January 2017: Former President Barack Obama ordered final transfers of prisoners from Guantanamo Bay on his watch. Eighteen detainees were transferred in January alone; 41 remain and will be inherited by President Donald Trump, who has been critical of Obama’s efforts to close the prison.

### ***IRAN BALLISTIC MISSILE TESTING***

- ◆ January 29, 2017: Iran tested a medium-range ballistic missile from a site east of Tehran. While the missile exploded after 630 miles, it is unclear whether this launch was in violation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1929 which states, “Iran is prohibited from undertaking any activity related to ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons and States are required to take all necessary measure to prevent the transfer of related technology or technical assistance.” During a press briefing the following day, White House spokesman Sean Spicer said the nature of the test was being examined.