



ISIS

Background

- ISIS—also referred to as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, the Islamic State, or Daesh—is a Salafi-jihadist militant group that split from al-Qa’ida in June 2014 to establish its self-proclaimed caliphate.
- ISIS has 13 official affiliates throughout Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, and claims responsibility for operations on behalf of these affiliates in an attempt to highlight a global reach. ISIS’s official media outlet that produces propaganda, *al-Hayat Media Center*, releases weekly updates detailing the casualties and equipment losses of its enemies.
- Since ISIS’s territorial peak in 2015, the group has lost approximately 99 percent of its land holdings in Iraq and Syria, including Raqqa, its self-proclaimed capital, and Mosul, its largest conquered city. Due to this loss of territory, ISIS is now primarily operating in the Euphrates River Valley along the Iraq and Syria border and reverting to insurgent tactics.



Threat to New Jersey: Moderate

The terror threat from ISIS to New Jersey is moderate due to the group’s ability to inspire homegrown violent extremists (HVEs) to conduct attacks in the State and surrounding region on behalf of the organization. Since 2015, ISIS has inspired nine attacks by HVEs in the region.

- On December 11, 2017, Akayed Ullah detonated an improvised explosive device in a New York City subway corridor near the Port Authority Bus Terminal, injuring two. Ullah claimed he conducted the attack in the name of ISIS. In November, a jury convicted Ullah for detonating the device and will sentence him in April 2019.
- On October 31, 2017, New Jersey resident Sayfullo Saipov (Passaic County) drove a rented truck down a bike path in lower Manhattan, killing eight and injuring 11. Authorities found a note claiming “ISIS Lives Forever” in the truck.
- On February 21, 2017, authorities arrested Gregory Lepsky in Point Pleasant Borough (Ocean County) for plotting to build a pressure-cooker bomb and detonate it in New York City in support of ISIS. Lepsky also planned to kill his mother and praised ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Following his arrest, officers found several books on jihad and suicide bombing. They discovered he read articles on how to make a pressure-cooker bomb, including “Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom,” published in al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula’s English-language magazine, *Inspire*. In March 2018, Lepsky pleaded guilty to one count of attempting to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist group.



Pro-ISIS propaganda threatening New York

United States Nexus

ISIS remains a threat to the United States due to its consistent calls for supporters to conduct attacks, targeting of US interests and personnel, and recruitment efforts of Westerners.

- After almost a year of silence from Baghdadi, the group released an audio message from him encouraging lone acts of violence against the West and urging followers to conduct simple attacks using knives, firearms, bombs, or personal vehicles.
- ISIS fighters monitor US force movements and operations in Syria to prepare for attacks against them. In January, ISIS launched a suicide operation targeting American forces in Manbij, killing four Americans and injuring 10 others. The following week, ISIS fighters targeted a US convoy. ISIS continues to express a desire to conduct attacks against US personnel and interests in the United States and abroad.
- In January, authorities arrested and charged three individuals in Michigan with material support after two of them helped purchase a plane ticket for the third to travel to Somalia to join ISIS. In October, authorities arrested Naser Almadaoji in Ohio after he attempted to travel to Afghanistan to join and fight for ISIS. In both cases, the individuals expressed a desire to conduct an attack in the United States on behalf of the group if their travel was unsuccessful.

In May 2017, ISIS featured Zulfy Hoxha of Margate (Atlantic County), also known as Abu Hamza al-Amriki (“the American”), in a propaganda video calling for attacks in the United States. According to media reports, he is a senior commander within the organization.



Additional Resources

[2019 Terrorism Threat Assessment](#)

[Persistent Threat: Evolving Strategies Of International Terror Groups](#)

[ISIS Releases First Statement From Leader In Almost A Year](#)