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Country Report on Terrorism 2023 - Chapter 1 - Lebanon

Overview: In 2023 the United States provided security assistance and training to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and worked with the Internal Security Forces (ISF) to enhance their counterterrorism capabilities and ability to investigate and prosecute local terrorism cases. Terrorist groups operating in Lebanon included U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organizations such as Hizballah and ISIS, as well as Hamas and other Palestinian terror organizations.

Despite the Government of Lebanon's (GOL's) official policy of disassociation from regional conflicts, Hizballah, a U.S.-designated terrorist organization that also has representation within the Lebanese government, continued its military role in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen in collaboration with the Iranian regime. Separately, Lebanon's 12 Palestinian refugee camps remained largely outside the control of Lebanese security forces and experienced terrorist recruitment and infiltration. Terrorist groups, including ISIS, continued to recruit Lebanese nationals to participate in conflicts in Iraq and Syria. In addition, several individuals on the FBI's Most Wanted List and the Department of State's Rewards for Justice list reportedly remained in Lebanon.

2023 Terrorist Incidents: Notable incidents in 2023 included the following:

- On April 6 an unidentified group launched 36 rockets from Lebanon into Israel, causing two injuries. While no group ultimately claimed responsibility, Israeli security sources assessed Hamas was behind the attack. The launch site and rockets used were similar to a confirmed Hamas launch site used in November.

- On October 9 the Palestinian Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for an operation in which fighters crossed south from Lebanon into Israel and attacked an Israel Defense Forces position, killing three soldiers.
- On October 17 and 18, about 1,200 protestors approached the U.S. Embassy in Beirut and sought to gain access, some chanting, "Death to America." When the ISF and the LAF blocked the group, protestors threw Molotov cocktails, set neighboring buildings on fire and assaulted security officers, resulting in injuries to 58 ISF and eight LAF personnel. Local reporting described the protestors as residents of Palestinian refugee camps mobilized by Hamas and other Palestinian political factions, whose social media provocations also had been amplified by supporters of Hizballah.
- Throughout October, November, and December, Hamas announced it had carried out unguided rocket attacks in addition to drone attacks on Israeli towns. The following is list of publicly reported attacks between October 8 and the end of 2023 launched from Lebanese territory:
 - On November 6, Hamas claimed responsibility for launching rockets toward Nahariya in northern Israel.
 - On November 8, Hamas claimed responsibility for launching rockets toward multiple locations in northern Israel.
 - On November 13, Hamas claimed responsibility for launching rockets toward the Israeli cities of Haifa and Nahariya.
 - On December 19, Hamas claimed responsibility for launching rockets toward the town of Kiryat Shmona.
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- From October 8 to the end of 2023, Hizballah carried out near-daily missile and rocket attacks against Israel (except during the November ceasefire in Gaza, when there was a general stoppage in Hizballah strikes on Israel). Hizballah's strikes across the border killed Israeli civilians, put Lebanese civilians in southern Lebanon at risk from return fire, and threatened to escalate the conflict. The following list details a small fraction of Hizballah's attacks on Israel carried out since October:
 - On November 5, Hizballah claimed responsibility for launching rockets toward the town of Kiryat Shmona, killing one civilian.
 - On November 12, Hizballah claimed responsibility for launching a missile toward Dovev that killed one civilian. In addition, Hizballah claimed responsibility for a mortar attack on the Israeli border town of Manara that injured seven IDF soldiers.
 - On December 7, Hizballah claimed responsibility for launching a missile at a civilian vehicle in the town of Mattat, killing the

civilian driver.

- On December 27, Hizballah claimed responsibility for a guided missile attack on a church near the Israeli town of Shomera that injured two civilians.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: Lebanon does not have a comprehensive CT law, but several articles of Lebanon's criminal code are used effectively to prosecute acts of terrorism. No new laws related to terrorism were passed in 2023. The LAF, the ISF, the Directorate of General Security (DGS), and the General Directorate of State Security were the primary government agencies responsible for counterterrorism. The existing law permits military intelligence personnel to make arrests without warrants in cases involving terrorism and does not provide a universal right to remain silent. Structural limitations in the justice system remained a barrier to conducting trials on terrorism cases in a timely manner. Because of due-process delays, some individuals suspected of terrorism were held in pretrial detention for extended periods. Although cooperation among the services was inconsistent, they took steps to improve information sharing.

In 2023 the Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) funded equipment and training programs for ISF units, judges, and prosecutors to improve their investigation and prosecution of complex criminal cases, including terrorism-related cases. INL support to the ISF's modernization plans provided enhanced information management for key ISF units, improving performance against criminal and terrorist threats. In an effort to reduce disparities in evidentiary standards that hinder the prosecution of terrorism cases, Embassy Beirut's Regional Security Office extended CT Bureau ATA Digital Evidence Preservation training to Lebanese police, prosecutors, and investigative judges. This initiative led to an ISF-driven strategic framework for a fusion center for cyber-based counterterrorism investigations that will support investigations based on ATA-supplied forensic and cyber hardware, software, and training platforms.

U.S. assistance in building counterterrorism (CT) capacity is funded primarily through CT Bureau Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) funds. In 2023, ATA spent more than \$6 million providing training and equipment to the ISF and the LAF, focusing on counter-IED, protection of national leadership, response to terrorist activities, and cyber-based investigations with digital forensics.

Lebanon made efforts to implement UNSC resolutions 2396 and 2309 by collecting biographic data for travelers at Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport, including Passenger Name Record and Advance Passenger Information data. DGS regularly updated INTERPOL watchlist information at border security terminals at the Beirut International Airport. DGS routinely shared information about falsified travel documents with foreign

embassies in Lebanon. Lebanese security services coordinated with the United States on numerous occasions to investigate individuals involved in terrorism.

LAF and ISF units, including those receiving U.S. capacity building assistance, undertook enforcement actions against suspected terrorists. The LAF announced it had arrested individuals throughout the year for membership in terrorist organizations, including seven members of ISIS and one member of the al-Nusra Front who fought against the LAF in 2014. Most of the individuals arrested were Syrian or Lebanese.

While the GOL did not formally engage with repatriation of foreign terrorist fighters from Syria in 2023, security agencies prioritized investigation and arrest of ISIS fighters who had entered Lebanon. On November 1 the LAF reported that an intelligence unit had arrested two Syrian nationals for membership in ISIS, one of whom confessed to entering Lebanon illegally to recruit new members for the terrorist group and surveil LAF facilities and Roumieh prison grounds.

The presence of Hizballah in the Lebanese government continued to impede effective host government action against terrorist incidents. Investigations into politically sensitive murders – including the suspected assassination by Hizballah of civil society activist Lokman Slim in 2021 and the killing of an Irish UN Interim Force in Lebanon Peacekeeper in December 2022 – suffered from delays and roadblocks. Members of Hizballah accused of coordinating acts of international terrorism remain at large in Lebanon. On December 20 the U.S. DOJ unsealed an indictment against Samuel Salman El Reda for, among other things, helping plan and execute the 1994 Argentine Jewish Mutual Association bombing in Buenos Aires; DOJ stated that Reda resides in Lebanon. Two individuals convicted in absentia during the U.S.-supported Special Tribunal for Lebanon for their role in the 2005 assassination of Rafic Hariri remain at large. Some Lebanese security forces personnel may interact with Hizballah as part of official duties, but they are not beholden to or controlled by the terrorist group.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Lebanon is a member of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force, and its Financial Intelligence Unit, the Special Investigation Commission, is a member of the Egmont Group.

In December, Lebanon completed its mutual evaluation, which noted that coordination among law enforcement agencies helped enable terrorist financing (TF) policies and resulted in detecting professional and organized criminal groups and uncovering their funding means. However, the report identified deficiencies in investigating, prosecuting, and sharing information about TF activities fully in line with Lebanon's risk profile. Lebanon has not demonstrated that it pursues TF offenses, or shares

information about TF offenses, committed by members of Hizballah, a major local paramilitary organization with a well-documented track record of committing terrorist acts as defined by the Financial Action Task Force.

International and Regional Cooperation: Lebanon supported counterterrorism efforts in regional organizations and participated in CT finance programs. Lebanese municipalities continued to engage in activities organized by the Strong Cities Network. Lebanon is a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS.

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