

Document #2032522

USDOS – US Department of State

Country Report on Terrorism 2019 - Chapter 1 - Libya

Overview: The ongoing conflict involving the Government of National Accord (GNA) and Libyan National Army (LNA)-aligned forces, as well as other nonstate actors, prevented Libyan authorities from dedicating sufficient resources to the fight against terrorist groups. However, both GNA- and LNA-aligned forces conducted CT operations during the year, arresting or killing dozens of ISIS or AQIM fighters. U.S. strikes on ISIS-Libya targets further degraded this group. The GNA continued to work with the United States to counter the spread of terrorist groups such as ISIS-Libya and AQIM, albeit to a more limited degree following the departure of U.S. forces from Libya in April. The GNA's effectiveness was constrained both by the lack of control it exerted over national forces and by its diminished geographic reach.

Since the 2016 expulsion of ISIS from Sirte, the group has lacked a concentrated, physical presence in Libya, instead spreading into smaller groups with a presence in both urban environments and the sparsely populated desert districts of Jufra, Sebha, and Murzuq. In southern Libya, where terrorist groups operated most freely, forces aligned with the LNA conducted operations against AQIM and ISIS. All acknowledged terrorist attacks by ISIS in 2019 were conducted against LNA forces or against civilian targets in areas under LNA control. The LNA undertook CT efforts in areas under its control.

In coordination with the GNA authorities in Tripoli, the United States conducted four precision airstrikes on ISIS in southern Libya in September 2019, killing 43 ISIS fighters and displacing remaining elements. The GNA has also cooperated with the United States on the investigation of suspected terrorists. Libya is a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS.

2019 Terrorist Incidents:

- On April 9, ISIS militants killed two people in the town of al-Fuqaha in Jufra province (central Libya). One of the victims was the head of the municipal council. The group also kidnapped an LNA security official and burned several houses in the town. Former ISIS head Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi later praised the attack in a video.
- On May 4, ISIS fighters carried out an assault against LNA forces at the Jabril Baba camp near the southern Libyan city of Sebha, killing at least nine LNA soldiers from the 160th Brigade, one of whom was beheaded. ISIS later claimed to have released inmates detained in the training camp's detention facility.
- On May 9, ISIS conducted an attack on the town of Ghadduwa (45 miles south of Sebha), killing three people, including former Libyan diplomat Ali al-Kaboush. ISIS also kidnapped one individual and issued a statement claiming responsibility for burning down 14 houses and local LNA military facilities.
- On May 18, ISIS fighters conducted a small-arms attack at a checkpoint on the road from Zilla to Waddan near a facility operated by a subsidiary of the Libyan National Oil Corporation, killing three LNA soldiers and briefly kidnapping four others. One of the ISIS fighters reportedly detonated a person-borne improvised explosive device to prevent capture.
- On July 11, three explosive devices were detonated at the Huwari Cemetery in Benghazi during the funeral of Khalifa Mismari, a former Libyan Special Forces commander. Several high-ranking LNA officers were present at the scene of the attack. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack, which killed four and wounded 33.
- On August 10, unknown attackers detonated a car bomb in front of a shopping mall near the Commerce and Investment Bank in the Hawari neighborhood of Benghazi targeting a UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) convoy. The attackers killed three UNSMIL guards and wounded scores of bystanders, including children.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: Libya did not pass or implement any CT legislation in 2019. Libya lacks a comprehensive CT law, although the Libyan penal code criminalizes offenses that may threaten national security, including terrorism, the promotion of terrorist acts, and the handling of money in support of such acts. Libya has ratified the Africa Union's Convention

on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, which requires states to criminalize terrorist acts under their national laws. The GNA has continued to support and seek international cooperation to combat ISIS.

A number of state and nonstate organizations, both outside and under official GNA authority, claimed CT responsibilities. GNA-aligned groups with the greatest CT capacity included the Misratan Joint Security Operations Room (MJSOR) and the Tripoli-based Special Deterrence Force (aka “Rada Force”), a Salafist militia nominally integrated into the GNA Ministry of Interior. MJSOR, Rada Force, and the GNA MOI conducted more than 20 arrest operations against terrorists who were current or former members of ISIS, AQIM, and other AQIM-affiliated groups in 2019, detaining more than 31 terrorist suspects. The LNA Western, Eastern, and Southern CT Operations Rooms conducted more than 25 operations during which it arrested at least 57 and killed at least 44 individuals connected with these same terrorist groups. Because of the limited geographic reach of the internationally recognized GNA, the GNA’s ability to deter or reduce terrorist activities was limited to areas under its control. Libyan law enforcement personnel lacked clear mandates and the capacity to detect, deter, respond to, or investigate terrorist incidents due to continued political and security force fragmentation.

The Libyan government, through its National Team for Border Security and Management, continued work in 2019 to develop a comprehensive border management strategy. Although approval of a national strategy will be an important step, Libya continues to struggle to secure the country’s thousands of miles of land, air, and maritime borders. The U.S. Department of State provided training and other technical assistance to Libyan airport officials, border guards, customs agents, and police and intelligence forces in securing airports against the threat of terrorism, which included preventive security measures consisting of access control, passenger and cabin baggage screening, hold baggage screening, and air and mail cargo handling.

Despite the arrests of dozens of new terrorist suspects and the referral of some suspects to the public prosecutor, there were no reported terrorism-related prosecutions in 2019. In many parts of Libya, armed groups, rather than state institutions, provide security and law enforcement functions, including detention of terrorist elements. National police and security forces are fragmented, are inadequately trained and equipped, and lack clear reporting chains and coordination mechanisms. Libya’s military forces are similarly weak and fragmented. Nonstate armed groups often overshadow formal security structures.

The following are two examples of operations and arrests by state and nonstate forces in 2019:

- On November 29, the GNA Ministry of Interior arrested Emad Faraj Mansour al-Shuqabi on terrorism charges related to his collaboration with known members of ISIS. Al-Shuqabi was arrested by the Tajoura Branch of the Central Support Forces, and he was referred to the GNA Attorney General for prosecution.
- On December 13, the LNA-aligned Central Investigations Directorate in Benghazi arrested two men under the suspicion of smuggling funds for terrorist financing purposes in support of ISIS in cooperation with an Egyptian national. Following the arrests, firearms and ammunition were recovered at the suspects’ homes. Both men confessed to the allegations, identifying two other suspects in the process, and their files were transferred to the public prosecutor in Benghazi.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Libya is a member of MENAFATF. Libya is also a member of the Defeat-ISIS Coalition’s CIFG. There were no significant updates in 2019.

Countering Violent Extremism: There were no changes in 2019.

International and Regional Cooperation: International assistance continued in 2019, although the outbreak of conflict for Tripoli in April forced many donor nations to curtail assistance efforts or conduct assistance outside Libya. Libya is a member of the UN, the AU, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the Arab League, and it has participated in regional workshops administered by the UN.

ecoi.net summary:

Annual report on
terrorism (covering 2019)



Country:

Libya

Source:

[USDOS – US Department of
State](#)

Original link:

<https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2019/libya/>

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Published:

24 June 2020

Document ID:

2032522

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ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

