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Country Report on Terrorism 2019 - Chapter 1 - Democratic Republic of the Congo

Overview: Rebel group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) established ties with ISIS in late 2018. Before its ISIS affiliation, the ADF previously attempted outreach to Islamist terrorist groups for multiple years, including online posts by some ADF members in 2016 and 2017 referring to their group Madinat Tauheed Wal Mujahedeen while displaying an ISIS-like flag. ISIS publicly recognized ADF as an affiliate in late 2018 and claimed responsibility for ADF attributed attacks starting in April 2019 after an attack on an Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) base near Kamango on April 16. The ADF has been present in Beni for years and now includes a majority of Congolese fighters, although the ADF recruits fighters from around the region as well. In 2019, as in previous years, the ADF was responsible for numerous attacks on civilians, the FARDC, and UN peacekeepers. During the calendar year, the Kivu Security Tracker (a joint project between the Congo Research Group and Human Rights Watch) documented 310 civilian deaths in North Kivu attributed to the ADF, as of December 13, 2019.

According to the UN, there are more than 100 armed groups operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), yet, historically, the DRC and the international community have generally not referred to these armed groups as terrorists. For political purposes, the government of former President Joseph Kabila labeled certain anti-Kabila domestic armed groups and some opposition party members as “terrorists” for challenging DRC government authority or criticizing the president.

The U.S. government continues to work closely with the Government of the DRC to address potential terrorist threats. In April, newly elected President Felix Tshisekedi visited Washington and publicly discussed the potential for ISIS expansion in North Kivu. During the visit, the DRC formally joined the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. During the year, the United States offered training and exchanges in best practices with the FARDC on civil-military operations, strategic planning and messaging, and asymmetric warfare, emphasizing the importance of human rights and the law of armed conflict in CT operations.

2019 Terrorist Incidents: Throughout 2019, the ADF attacked Congolese civilians, the FARDC, and MONUSCO peacekeepers located in Beni Territory, North Kivu and southern parts of Ituri in eastern DRC. The Kivu Security Tracker reported that the ADF had killed at least 310 civilians in Beni Territory as of December 13, with press reporting at least 32 additional deaths as of December 20. A significant increase in planned attacks on civilians was announced by ADF in response to FARDC operations against the ADF launched on October 30.

Attacks have been conducted against civilians primarily by small groups of fighters, using small arms or machetes for the majority of attacks in areas where the ADF has been present for years. There has not been a significant change in tactics or weapons used since the ADF’s public affiliation with ISIS.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: The DRC has no comprehensive CT legislation. The DRC’s National Assembly passed a draft counterterrorism bill in December 2018, which stalled in the Senate and was not finalized in 2019. Civil society activists and others expressed concern that, if passed as written by the previous Kabila administration, the law could be used as a tool to suppress opposition parties and political dissent. In a significant shift from the previous reporting period, national police leadership attended several international fora on combating terrorism, including Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS meetings and INTERPOL CT training.

The DRC shares approximately 6,835 miles of land and lake borders with nine countries and lacks the capacity to effectively patrol its borders. The authority responsible for monitoring frontier activity, the Director General of Migration, uses the International Organization for Migration’s Migration Information and Data Analysis System (MIDAS), a computerized personal identification and recognition system, at only a fraction of the DRC’s more than 400 official border crossings. Since 2010, the Department of State’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) has trained roughly 900 border officers from the National Police’s (PNC’s) Direction Centrale de la

Police des Frontieres Congolaise (Central Border Police Directorate), which oversees security and surveillance activities at border crossings. High turnover rates prevalent throughout the PNC resulted in few INL-trained officers remaining with border units. The PNC anti-riot unit, the Légion Nationale d'Intervention, has a designated CT squad, which has limited staff and receives no specialized training or equipment.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: The DRC is a member of GABAC.

Following U.S. Treasury sanctions designations in December against Lebanon-based Nazen Said Ahmad and DRC-based Saleh Assi for supporting Specially Designated Global Terrorists, the Government of the DRC took swift action to freeze accounts belonging to sanctioned individuals and companies in the DRC owned, controlled, or directed by them.

Countering Violent Extremism: There were no major changes in 2019. DRC religious institutions including the Council of Bishops (CENCO – Episcopal), the Church of Christ in Congo (ECC – Protestant), and the Islamic community (COMICO), attended a weeklong workshop in Switzerland, led by CENCO, focused on preventing violent conflict in central Africa.

International and Regional Cooperation: The DRC is a member of the Southern African Development Community and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. President Tshisekedi has raised the need for regional cooperation with these partners to combat armed groups and bring stability to the eastern DRC.

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