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Overview: Lebanon grappled with significant terrorist threats in 2015, both internally and on its borders as a result of worsening spillover from Syria. Hizballah, which fully mobilized in support of the Asad regime, and to a lesser extent individual Lebanese who supported various opposition forces, made Lebanon a magnet for violent retribution. After nearly a year of relative internal calm, the November 12 Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) suicide bombings in Beirut's southern suburbs marked the capital's deadliest terrorist attack in more than a decade and were reminiscent of the wave of Sunni terrorist attacks against Shia population centers and Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) targets in 2013-2014. Lebanon also faced a terrorist threat from hundreds of ISIL and al-Nusrah Front terrorists who operated along the porous, undemarcated eastern border with Syria and carried out guerrilla-like attacks against the LAF on a regular basis. The continued presence of these Syria-origin Sunni extremists in Lebanese territory underscored both the centrality of border security to Lebanon's stability and the importance of enabling the Lebanese government to exercise its full sovereignty, as mandated by UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1701.

Despite the paralysis of the political decision-making apparatus, various institutions of the Lebanese state, including the LAF, Internal Security Forces (ISF), and Central Bank, continued to cooperate with international partners in combating terrorism and have scored some notable successes in the disruption of terrorist networks and in combating terrorist forces. The United States remained Lebanon's closest counterterrorism partner, and the bilateral relationship is robust and growing. U.S. assistance focused on strengthening Lebanon's security institutions so they can better exert sovereign authority and maintain border security in accordance with UNSCR 1701, and counter terrorist threats.

Ongoing internal political deadlock prevented the election of a new Lebanese president and weakened state function. In the absence of a president, the 24-member cabinet, which includes members of Hizballah, is paralyzed in political deadlock and has not met regularly since mid-2015. Lebanon's enormous refugee crisis has also complicated efforts to maintain stability. A country of approximately four million, Lebanon hosted nearly 1.1 million registered refugees from Syria as of the end of 2015. Lebanese authorities were challenged not only by the significant burden the refugees placed on its financial and natural resources, infrastructure, and host communities, but also by fears of potential militant recruiting among the refugee population. ISIL and Nusrah Front's use of informal refugee settlements near the northeastern town of Aarsal in the Beqaa Valley further hardened Lebanese attitudes towards Syrian refugees.

Hizballah, with considerable support from Iran, remained the most capable terrorist group in Lebanon, enjoying popular support among many Lebanese Shia and allied Christians. Hizballah continued to operate as an armed militia beyond the control of the state and as a powerful political actor that can hobble or topple the government. Hizballah justified its stockpile of arms for its "resistance" to any potential conflict with Israel. The government did not take significant action to disarm Hizballah or eliminate its safe havens in Lebanese territory. Despite Lebanon's official dissociation policy regarding the Syrian conflict, Hizballah accelerated its military role in support of the Syrian regime in 2015 and has proved to be a necessary force in propping up the regime. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has had a presence in Lebanon since the early 1980s and coordinated closely with Hizballah on military operations and training. Hizballah engaged in terrorist activity against Israel on January 28 when it attacked an Israeli military convoy near the Shebaa Farms area, killing two Israeli soldiers and wounding several others. The attack was the most severe eruption of violence between Israel and Hizballah in the area since 2006.

Other designated terrorist groups, including Hamas, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine General Command, Asbat al-Ansar, Fatah al-Islam, Fatah al-Intifada, Jund al-Sham, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Abdullah Azzam Brigades, and several other splinter groups, continued to operate within Lebanon's borders, although primarily out of Lebanon's 12 Palestinian refugee camps. ISIL and Nusrah Front also had a limited, but growing presence in the camps. The LAF did not maintain a presence in the camps, but it conducted limited operations and patrols near the camps and across Lebanon to counter terrorist threats.

Lebanon is a member of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL and the Foreign Minister has attended several counter-ISIL Coalition ministerial meetings. The Lebanese security forces seek to limit the ISIL threat at home, including the flow of foreign terrorist fighters both to and from Syria, by working to secure the porous, ungoverned border with Syria and conducting counterterrorism operations within Lebanon. The LAF and other security services also were actively engaged in monitoring potential ISIL elements in Lebanon, disrupting their activities and networks, and arresting those suspected of plotting terrorist attacks. The government expanded its efforts to counter ISIL messaging, but these efforts were not coordinated among different government agencies. In accordance with UNSCR 2178, the Lebanese government increased security measures at airports and border crossings to prevent the flow of ISIL and Nusrah Front fighters to Syria and Iraq. However, the Lebanese government has not taken significant action to prevent Hizballah from sending its fighters to Syria and Iraq.

2015 Terrorist Incidents:

- On January 10, two suicide bombers attacked a café in the Tripoli neighborhood of Jabal Mohsen, killing nine people and wounding more than 30. Al-Nusrah Front claimed responsibility for the attack.
- On January 28, Hizballah fired two laser-guided, anti-tank missiles from Lebanese territory at an Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) convoy near the Shebaa Farms area south of the Blue Line, killing two IDF soldiers and wounding several others.
- On November 5, at least five people were killed and several others wounded after a suicide bomber detonated his suicide vest at a religious center in Aarsal. Lebanese authorities believed that ISIL carried out the attack, which targeted a group of Syrian Sunni clerics with close ties to the Nusrah Front.
- On November 12, two suicide bombers attacked a crowded street in Burj al-Barajneh, a neighborhood closely associated with Hizballah in the southern suburbs of Beirut, killing at

least 45 civilians and wounding nearly 250 more. ISIL claimed responsibility for the attack, which was the deadliest in Beirut in more than a decade.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: Lebanon does not have a comprehensive counterterrorism law, but several articles of Lebanon's criminal code (1943) are used to prosecute acts of terrorism. Implementation of these articles has at times been hindered by Lebanon's complex confessional political system, however, and also by Hizballah restricting access to attack sites that were within areas under its control. The cabinet did not consider legislative initiatives that could potentially threaten Hizballah's operations, as the presence of Hizballah and its political allies in the government make the requisite consensus on such actions impossible. State security agencies remained functional in combating non-Hizballah terrorism, but would benefit from stronger political support.

The LAF, ISF, Directorate of General Security (DGS), and Directorate of State Security (DGSS) are the primary agencies responsible for combating terrorism. Despite notable counterterrorism successes in 2015, the law enforcement capacity of these agencies was overstretched due to the magnitude of the country's terrorism-related threats. Although cooperation among the services was inconsistent, all services have taken steps to improve information sharing and are receptive to additional training to expand capacity. Lebanon has been a participant in the Department of State's Antiterrorism Assistance program since 2006; this assistance has focused on border security as well as building law enforcement's investigative and leadership capabilities. The Department of State has provided assistance to improve the capabilities of the ISF through a multi-year program that includes construction of training facilities and establishment of a secure radio communications system, provision of vehicles, protective gear, and other types of equipment, and a wide range of training and mentoring activities. The Department of State also provided corrections training to bolster the ISF's limited capacity to manage its overcrowded prisons. The ISF has worked to prevent terrorist recruitment and the direction of terrorist activities by prison inmates who, in many cases, have access to cell phones and the internet.

The LAF has primary responsibility for securing Lebanon's borders, but worked collaboratively with other agencies to prevent the infiltration of terrorists and illicit goods. The services have increased security measures at airports, border crossings, and ports to prevent the flow of ISIL and Nusrah Front fighters to Syria and Iraq, with a special emphasis on detecting counterfeit passports. The DGS, under the Interior Ministry, controls immigration and passport services, and it uses an electronic database to collect biographic data for travelers at all points of entry. Lebanon collects and disseminates Passenger Name Records (PNR) on commercial flights, but does not collect advance passenger information (API).

The Lebanese security services disrupted multiple terrorist networks and made several high-profile arrests in 2015. On August 15, the DGS arrested Sheikh Ahmed al-Assir, a radical Salafist cleric who was one of Lebanon's most wanted fugitives since June 2013, when Assir and his supporters killed 18 soldiers during clashes with the LAF near Sidon. Information obtained during Assir's interrogation led to arrests of more than a dozen other suspected terrorists. In mid-November, the Lebanese security services unraveled terrorist networks in Beirut and Tripoli connected with ISIL's November 12 suicide attacks in Burj al-Barajneh. One ISF raid yielded 150 kilograms of explosives and three suicide vests.

On May 13, the Lebanese Military Court sentenced former Lebanese Information Minister Michel Samaha to four and a half years in prison for "transporting explosives from Syria to Lebanon in an attempt to assassinate Lebanese political and religious leaders" in 2012. Procedural errors and public outcry over the relatively light sentence prompted a retrial, which began in July but did not produce a new verdict by the end of 2015.

The United States maintains close ties with the Lebanese security services and could expect significant investigative support in a terrorism case affecting U.S. citizens or interests. Lebanese authorities maintained that amnesty for Lebanese involved in acts of violence during the 1975-90 civil wars prevented terrorism prosecutions of concern to the United States.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Lebanon is a member of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force, a Financial Action Task Force-style regional body; and its financial intelligence unit, the Special Investigation Commission (SIC), is a member of the Egmont Group. It also participates in the Counter-ISIL Finance Group co-chaired by the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Italy. Lebanese government officials and financial leaders have also met repeatedly with the U.S. government regarding the Hizballah International Financing Prevention Act of 2015, and said that they would fully comply with the new regulations.

Lebanon's Central Bank, the Banque du Liban (BdL), issued Intermediate Circular No. 393 on June 30, amending Basic Circular No. 69, strengthening anti-money laundering/countering the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) controls on money remitters. On November 13, Parliament endorsed three laws intended to strengthen Lebanon's AML/CFT regime, which were published in the Official Gazette on November 24. These included:

- Law No.44 amending AML/CFT Law 318/2001 to further widen categories of reporting entities and increase the list of predicate crimes; it also allows confiscation of assets and sharing of confiscated assets with concerned countries;
- Law No. 42 requiring the declaration of cross-border transportation of cash; and
- Law No. 43 on the exchange of tax information, which would authorize the Ministry of Finance to join bilateral and multilateral agreements to exchange information related to tax evasion and tax fraud.

In 2015, the ISF received two requests for assistance with terrorism cases from INTERPOL; the ISF investigated the two cases and forwarded them to the Public Prosecutor. The ISF did not receive any allegations of suspicious financial transactions that led to terrorism finance cases in 2015. The SIC is an independent legal entity empowered to investigate suspicious financial transactions and to freeze assets, reporting that it had received three cases in 2015 regarding individuals with alleged terrorism ties and alleged terrorism financing transactions. The SIC froze the individuals' financial assets (amounts undisclosed) in Lebanon's banking sector and forwarded the cases to the public prosecutor for further investigation.

For further information on money laundering and financial crimes, see the *2016 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR), Volume II, Money Laundering and Financial Crimes*: <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/index.htm>.

Countering Violent Extremism: Several government institutions have programs that seek to counter violent extremism (CVE), but there was no overall national strategy in place. The Foreign Minister attended the Leaders' Summit on Countering ISIL and Violent Extremism hosted by President Obama in September 2015 on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, and MFA representatives have attended U.S.-hosted working level meetings on counter-ISIL messaging. The LAF is developing a comprehensive counter-messaging strategy that amplifies moderate voices and uses TV spots, social media, billboards, and SMS texts to counter extremist narratives. There were no programs to rehabilitate and/or reintegrate terrorists into mainstream society.

International and Regional Cooperation: The LAF partnered with several nations on a bilateral basis to receive training programs that focused on strengthening its counterterrorism capabilities. Lebanon is a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Arab League, and attended

Global Counterterrorism Forum meetings on counter-ISIL efforts. Lebanon continued to voice its commitment to fulfilling other relevant UNSCRs, including 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006), and 1701 (2006). The Special Tribunal for Lebanon, an international body investigating the 2005 assassination of former PM Rafiq Hariri, received Lebanon's annual contribution of approximately US \$37.5 million on September 21.

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