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USDOS – US Department of State

Country Report on Terrorism 2018 - Chapter 1 - Egypt

Overview: Egypt is a counterterrorism partner of the United States, a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, and a member of the GCTF. Attacks in mainland Egypt increased in 2018 while the number of attacks in Sinai diminished compared with 2017. However, from July 2018 forward the trend in Sinai was fewer but deadlier attacks. Attacks that occurred focused largely on security forces and the Christian community, civilians, and, to a lesser extent, foreign tourists. With the February launch of Operation Sinai 2018, President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi’s government and the Egyptian Security Forces (ESF) continued a concerted effort to fight terrorist groups in North Sinai, but terrorist attacks continued in both North Sinai and mainland Egypt. ISIS branches and networks, including ISIS-Sinai Province (ISIS-SP) and an ISIS network in mainland Egypt, posed the most significant threats of terrorism. U.S.-designated terrorist groups Harakat Sawa’d Misr and Liwa al-Thawra also posed a continued threat, but with diminished activities compared with previous years.

2018 Terrorist Incidents: ISIS affiliates and other terrorist groups carried out frequent attacks throughout Egypt. Methods included complex assaults involving dozens of terrorists, IEDs, VBIEDs, ambushes, kidnappings, and targeted assassinations. Notable terrorist attacks in 2018 included the following:

- On April 14, 14 ISIS-SP attackers armed with firearms, missiles, and suicide vests conducted a complex attack against Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF) in al-Qusayma, North Sinai, killing eight EAF personnel.
- On August 12, a suicide bomber detonated prematurely as he approached the al-Azra Coptic Church in the Shubra neighborhood of Cairo.
- On September 4, an individual was on foot just outside the perimeter of the U.S. Embassy in Cairo when his backpack exploded, lightly wounding him. The attacker was arrested by Egyptian police.
- On November 2, assailants opened fire on three buses carrying Coptic pilgrims to a monastery in Minya, Upper Egypt. Seven Coptic pilgrims were killed, and 19 were wounded. ISIS later claimed responsibility.
- On December 29, a tour bus struck a roadside bomb near the Pyramids of Giza, killing three Vietnamese tourists and an Egyptian tour guide and injuring 11 others.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: In August, President al-Sisi ratified a law combating use of the internet by “extremist” and terrorist organizations to carry out attacks. The Anti-Cyber and Information Technology Crimes law prohibits “the dissemination of information on the movements of the army or police,” and “the promotion of the ideas of terrorist organizations.” Although the law had not been implemented by the end of 2018, human rights groups have criticized the law as too expansive, arguing that it could be used to block any website critical of the government.

In February, the EAF and ESF launched Operation Sinai 2018, with the stated objective of eliminating terrorism in Sinai. The operation saw increased coordination between the Ministries of Defense and Interior in targeting terrorist elements in North Sinai. In addition to military operations, the Egyptian government announced that it planned to adapt its counterterrorism strategy to address immediate humanitarian needs and long-term economic and social development goals, though this has long been part of the government’s talking points about its activities in the Sinai.

The National Security Sector of the Ministry of Interior (MOI) is primarily responsible for counterterrorism operations in the Nile Valley but also works with other elements of the MOI, the Egyptian General Intelligence Service, and the EAF.

Egypt’s most significant physical border security concerns were Libya, Sudan, and Gaza. At border crossings and airports, Egyptian authorities checked for the presence of security features in travel documents. They also scanned and cross-referenced documents with criminal databases containing derogatory information. Egypt maintains a terrorist watchlist with a simple listing for Egyptian immigration officials at the ports of entry and with detailed information maintained by the security services. The United States assisted Egypt’s counterterrorism efforts by providing training, equipment, and other assistance to its law enforcement security services.

Egypt indicated that it would require, and plans to formally request, international assistance to enhance its technical capabilities to implement UNSCR 2396 to counter terrorist travel.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Egypt is a member of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF) and Egypt’s Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Combating Unit (EMLCU) is a member of the Egmont Group. In 2018, EMLCU approved new customer due diligence procedures and know your customer rules.

Egypt has taken a leading role in the Egmont Group, serving as Chair of the Membership, Support, and Compliance Working Group. In 2018, EMLCU implemented SIRON, an automatic advanced analytics system developed by the UN for anti-money laundering efforts, across the Egyptian banking system. EMLCU works with the Egyptian National Security Agency on terrorism cases and with the Administrative Control Authority on public cases. EMLCU is a member of Egypt’s National Payments Council, which is chaired by President al-Sisi, and is responsible for coordinating government efforts to modernize payment methods in Egypt.

For additional information on money laundering and financial crimes, see the *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR), Volume II, Money Laundering and Financial Crimes* (<https://www.state.gov/2019-international-narcotics-control-strategy-report/>).

Countering Violent Extremism: Dar al-Iftaa, an official body that issues religious edicts and is associated with al-Azhar University, has taken the lead on CVE messaging and countering religious guidance from terrorist groups. In October, Dar al-Iftaa hosted its fourth international conference on global strategies to limit fatwa issuance to “authoritative religious institutions.” Last year’s conference resulted in the launch of the Global Fatwa Index that, according to Egypt, endorses a scholarly methodology for observing, analyzing, and evaluating fatwa discourses worldwide and developing a curriculum for students of fatwa around the world.

Al-Azhar continued to issue statements promoting tolerance and challenging ISIS statements as part of

its domestic and online CVE messaging.

The Ministry of Islamic Endowments (Awqaf) continued to issue guidance to Egypt’s imams and provide a weekly theme for Friday sermons. In regard to increasing religious education opportunities and providing more leadership roles for women, Awqaf completed a training program in June on interpretation of religious texts for 300 female preachers, and in July the government published an action plan for renewing religious discourse that included hiring and training imams, expanding the role of women in religious preaching, and opening a training academy for preachers to help reach different segments of the public.

The Cairo Center for Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping in Africa (CCCPA), under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, provided training through its Preventing Radicalization and Extremism Leading to Terrorism (PRELT) program. PRELT aims to prevent the proliferation of “extremist” ideology among individuals in communities considered susceptible to terrorist recruitment. In 2018, CCCPA expanded its focus from sub-Saharan Africa into the Sahel.

International and Regional Cooperation: Egypt continued to support counterterrorism efforts through regional and multilateral organizations, including through the GCTF. Egypt currently co-chairs the GCTF East Africa Working Group with the EU, and in March hosted the working group’s annual plenary meeting in Cairo. As Chair of the Peace and Security Council of the AU, Egypt regularly prioritized discussions of counterterrorism issues. In January, Egypt used its chairmanship to organize a counterterrorism summit for heads-of-state, which focused on a comprehensive approach to counterterrorism. Egypt also announced a new counterterrorism center in Cairo for the Community of Sahel-Saharan States to promote cross-border cooperation in the Sahel-Saharan region.

ecoi.net summary:

Annual report on terrorism (covering 2018)



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