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Country Report on Terrorism 2020 - Chapter 1 - Uganda

Overview: Uganda is considered to have one of the most effective militaries in the region in terms of CT capabilities and has not suffered a major terrorist incident since the 2010 World Cup bombings claimed by al-Shabaab. However, with al-Shabaab active to the East in Somalia and parts of Kenya and ISIS-DRC (also known as the Allied Democratic Forces, a historically anti-Kampala group) to the West in the DRC, Uganda remains vigilant against the persistent threat of terrorism. In 2020, Uganda continued its role as the top troop-contributing country to AMISOM, the international effort to combat al-Shabaab in Somalia, with its most recent deployment on December 11.

2020 Terrorist Incidents: There were no reported terrorist incidents in Uganda in 2020.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: Uganda did not pass significant legislation or alter its security posture as it pertained to terrorism during 2020. However, it did make dramatic changes to its border posture because of other political priorities that could have had effects on terrorist operability. The Rwanda-Uganda border remained mostly closed owing to ongoing political disputes. Uganda shut all of its borders, including its international airport, almost entirely for several months during 2020 to prevent the spread of COVID-19 into the country.

During 2020, Uganda's law enforcement entities focused much of their "antiterrorism" effort on harassing the political opposition ahead of elections scheduled for 2021. For example, security services ostensibly operating under Uganda's Antiterrorism Act froze the bank accounts of four highly reputable democracy- and governance-focused civil society organizations in November.

Despite its strong military capabilities relative to the region, Uganda is vulnerable to terrorism owing to porous borders, lack of trust and information sharing among disparate security services, corruption, and diversions in security force capabilities toward political concerns.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Uganda is a member of ESAAMLG, and Uganda's FIU, known as the Financial Intelligence Authority, is a member of the Egmont Group.

Countering Violent Extremism: As of December, Uganda had still not approved its draft 2020 national strategy to counter violent extremism. Additionally, any progress previously made in improving community policing has likely been lost through multiple violent crackdowns by security services in the lead up to 2021 elections, such as during the November 18-19 protests when reports suggest security forces killed more than 50 civilians. Violence and prolonged and unexplained detention at the hands of law enforcement are some of the major "push factors" of violent extremism in Uganda, reinforcing a key narrative employed by violent extremist recruiters to radicalize youths to violence.

International and Regional CT Cooperation: Uganda was a key leader and active CT partner in AMISOM during 2020. Uganda continued to be the largest troop-contributing country for AMISOM, with close to 6,000 personnel, and was responsible for the region in Somalia that sees the most violence, especially from IEDs. In September, Uganda deployed two of five U.S.-donated Huey helicopters in support of AMISOM. In early December the Ugandan military conducted its first air medical evacuation operations using these helicopters from Baledogle Airfield to the Level-2 hospital in Mogadishu.

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