

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	332
Land:	Marokko-Vestsahara
Kilde:	US Department of State
Titel:	Country Reports on Terrorism 2021 – Morocco
Udgivet:	27. februar 2023
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	1. juni 2023

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Country Reports on Terrorism 2021: Morocco

BUREAU OF COUNTERTERRORISM

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Morocco

Overview: The United States and Morocco have a long history of strong CT cooperation. The Government of Morocco continued its comprehensive strategy that includes vigilant security measures, regional and international cooperation, and counter radicalization policies. In 2021, Morocco continued to mitigate the risk of terrorism. The country continued to face sporadic threats from small, independent terrorist cells, the majority of which claimed to be inspired by or affiliated with ISIS. Morocco is a member of the GCTF, which it co-chairs with Canada. Morocco is also a member of the Defeat-ISIS Coalition's Counter-ISIS Countering Violent Extremism Working Group and co-chairs the Africa Focus Group within the Coalition.

2021 Terrorist Incidents: There were no terrorist incidents reported in Morocco in 2021.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: Morocco investigates, prosecutes, and sentences defendants under CT legislation enacted in 2003 and expanded in 2015, and which is in line with UN Security Council resolution 2178.

In 2021, Moroccan law enforcement, coordinated by the Ministry of Interior, targeted and arrested at least 55 individuals in 11 CT operations, effectively dismantling cells in the early stages of planning attacks against a range of targets, including public buildings, prominent figures, government security service buildings, and, as reported in local press, foreigners. The

number of arrests in 2021 was lower than the number of arrests made in the years before the COVID-19 pandemic. Moroccan law enforcement leveraged intelligence collection, police work, and collaboration with international partners to conduct counterterrorism operations. The Central Bureau of Judicial Investigation (BCIJ) remains the primary law enforcement agency responsible for counterterrorism prosecutions. The BCIJ reports to the General Directorate for Territorial Surveillance (DGST) and operates under the supervision of the public prosecutor of the Court of Appeals.

The following offers a snapshot of arrests in 2021:

In March, the DGST arrested a 38-year-old male in Meknes. The suspect, a suspended police officer since 2015, also faced charges of extremist indoctrination of his children. The Moroccan authorities seized an ISIS flag, a knife, and a mobile phone.

In June, the DGST dismantled a six-member cell that was planning terrorist attacks in Salé. Cell members ranged from 23 to 39 years old and were orchestrating motorcycle accidents to collect insurance claims to finance terrorist operations. The DGST seized a motorcycle and medical documentation with the names of the suspects, records of the staged traffic accidents, digital data, and “extremist” literature, in addition to drugs.

In December, the DGST arrested 25 ISIS suspects affiliated with ISIS. The suspects planned terrorist attacks across Morocco against public targets and security services headquarters. The Moroccan authorities reportedly seized firearms, ammunition, knives, IED instructional documents, and ISIS literature.

Moroccan law enforcement agencies participated in a wide range of U.S.-sponsored programs to improve the country’s technical and investigative capabilities, including financial investigation, intelligence analysis, forensics, and cybersecurity.

Border security remained a top priority for Moroccan authorities. The General Directorate for National Security has primary responsibility for conducting border inspections at ports of entry such as Casablanca’s Mohammed V Airport. Law enforcement officials and private airline carriers worked regularly with the United States to detect and deter individuals attempting to transit illegally and to address watchlisted travelers. Moroccan airport authorities have excellent capabilities in detecting fraudulent documents. In addition, police, customs officers, and the Royal Gendarmerie operated mobile and fixed checkpoints along the roads in border areas and at the entrances to major municipalities. Moroccan naval and coast guard units monitored and patrolled Morocco’s extensive coastal waters, including the Strait of Gibraltar, to interdict illicit traffickers.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Morocco is a member of MENAFATF. The National Financial Intelligence Authority (FIU) is a member of the Egmont Group. In 2021, Morocco enacted stricter anti-money laundering legislation, in line with FATF standards, in response to a 2019 MENAFATF *Mutual Evaluation Report* that placed Morocco on increased monitoring status for money laundering.

Countering Violent Extremism: Morocco has a comprehensive CVE strategy that prioritizes economic and human development in addition to countering radicalization to violence and “oversight of the religious sphere.” To counter what it views as religious extremism, Morocco promotes an interpretation of the Maliki-Ashari school of Sunni Islam. The Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs has developed an educational curriculum for Morocco’s nearly 50,000 imams as well as for female Islamic guides (*mourchidates*).

Morocco’s imam training center in Rabat trains imams mostly from West Africa. The Royal Mohammedan League of Ulema (Rabita Mohammedia) counters “radicalization” by producing scholarly research, reviewing educational curricula, and conducting youth outreach on religious and social topics. The Department of State has supported the General Delegation for Prison Administration and Reintegration’s (DGAPR’s) efforts to modernize prison management, develop prisoner classification tools, control disturbances, modify inmate behavior, and construct more secure facilities. The DGAPR, in cooperation with other ministries, conducted several trainings of its deradicalization program, Moussalaha (Reconciliation), for both women and men.

International and Regional Cooperation: Morocco is a co-chair of the GCTF with Canada and is a member of the D-ISIS Coalition and the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership. A major non-NATO ally, in 2021 Morocco hosted African Lion, AFRICOM’s (U.S. Africa Command’s) largest and most complex military exercise, which includes specialized training for CT-related units. Additionally, the United Nations Office of Counterterrorism (UNOCT) established a UNOCT Program Office in Morocco for Specialized Counterterrorism and Law Enforcement Training in Africa; it opened in June and hosted several training courses in late 2021. Morocco also enjoys strong cooperation with European partners — particularly Belgium, France, and the Netherlands — to thwart potential terrorist threats in Europe.

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