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Country Report on Terrorism 2018 - Chapter 1 - Lebanon

Overview: Lebanon is a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and a committed partner in countering terrorism. In 2018, the United States provided security assistance and training to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to increase the LAF’s capacity as the sole legitimate defender of Lebanon’s sovereignty. The United States also worked with Lebanon’s defense and law enforcement organizations, such as the Internal Security Forces (ISF), to build its counterterrorism capabilities and its ability to investigate and prosecute local terrorism cases. Terrorist groups operating in Lebanon included U.S.-designated FTOs such as Hizballah, Hamas, ISIS, and the Abdullah Azzam Brigades. Hizballah remained the most capable terrorist organization in Lebanon, controlling areas in the Bekaa Valley, southern Lebanon, and south Beirut. In September, Hizballah announced that its armed militia had advanced its military capabilities and that the group possessed precision-guided missiles. In December, Israel announced the discovery of Hizballah-constructed tunnels that crossed the Lebanon-Israel frontier, several of which were later confirmed by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

Despite the Lebanese government’s official policy of disassociation from regional conflicts, Hizballah continued its military role in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen in support of the Syrian regime. Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine continued to operate in Lebanon’s 12 Palestinian refugee camps. The camps remained outside the control of Lebanese security forces and continued to pose a security threat because of their potential for militant recruitment and terrorist infiltration. Several terrorists on the FBI’s Most Wanted List and who are the subjects of the Department of State’s Rewards for Justice program are reportedly residing in Lebanon.

2018 Terrorist Incidents:

- On February 4, a LAF soldier was killed in Tripoli, and seven others were wounded while confronting and arresting ISIS militants.
- Lebanon-based terrorist group Hizballah continued to plan attacks around the world, as detailed in other sections of this report.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: Lebanon does not have a comprehensive counterterrorism law, but several articles of Lebanon’s criminal code are effectively used to prosecute acts of terrorism. In 2018, Lebanon took steps to adapt its laws to improve the investigation of cyber activities related to terrorism. The

Central Bank and Lebanon’s security services held the fourth edition of the Anti-Cybercrime Forum. The LAF, the ISF, the General Directorate of General Security, and the General Directorate of State Security are the primary government agencies responsible for counterterrorism. Although cooperation among the agencies was inconsistent, they took steps to improve information sharing and were receptive to additional capacity building and reforms.

In July, the LAF conducted a narco-terrorism raid targeting a drug dealer whom the LAF said funded activities of terrorist groups. In August, the ISF foiled an alleged ISIS plot to attack LAF checkpoints and churches in northern Lebanon. In September, Lebanese security forces detained an individual linked to ISIS over a plot to poison the LAF’s food and water supply. In November, the LAF conducted counter narco-terrorist operations in the Baalbek region in pursuit of fugitives of a dangerous armed gang. The security services involved in these successful operations benefited from significant U.S.-provided capacity-building assistance.

In 2018, Lebanese security services collaborated with the United States on numerous instances to foil terrorist plots and investigate and apprehend individuals involved in terrorism. However, corruption, unclear delineation of responsibilities among Lebanon’s security services, and an outdated judicial system with backlogged cases hampered law enforcement efforts. In addition, Hizballah’s role in Lebanon’s confessional power-sharing system continued to hinder government actions against the group’s terrorist activities.

The LAF has primary responsibility for securing Lebanon’s borders. In 2018, it further developed a network of border positions along the Lebanon-Syria border, including the construction of positions in territory previously occupied by ISIS. While Lebanon was not a source country for WMD components, its porous borders with Syria posed risks. In 2018, the LAF and other security services partnered with the U.S. government to detect and prevent the proliferation and trafficking of WMD. Lebanon collects biographic data for travelers at the Beirut International Airport, PNR data for commercial flights, and API. In 2018, the United States worked with Lebanon to develop a central repository to process and share biometric data among Lebanese security services.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Lebanon held the presidency of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF) in 2018. The FIU of Lebanon’s Central Bank—the Special Investigation Commission (SIC) – is a member of the Egmont Group. Lebanon is also a member of the Defeat-ISIS Coalition’s Counter-ISIS Finance Group.

In June, the Central Bank issued two Circulars requiring Collective Investment Schemes and Financial Intermediation Institutions to comply with the AML/CFT law and with relevant Central Bank or SIC regulations and directives. The Central Bank and members of the Association of Lebanese Banks reaffirmed their commitment to comply with U.S. sanctions, in accordance with Central Bank directives. Cooperation between the SIC and local enforcement authorities on terrorist financing cases improved in 2018. During the first nine months of the year, the SIC received seven terrorism and terrorism financing

cases from local sources. The SIC was able to identify and freeze assets and referred four terrorism financing cases to the general prosecutor. The SIC stated that terrorism financing prosecutions and convictions rendered by the military court have increased.

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: In March, Lebanon adopted its National Strategy for Preventing Violent Extremism. Anjar, Madjal, Saida, and Tripoli are members of the Strong Cities Network, and Lebanon is working to include other vulnerable cities around the country. The LAF continues to implement a comprehensive counter-messaging strategy that amplifies what it views as moderate voices and uses television spots, social media, billboards, and SMS messages to counter terrorist narratives.

International and Regional Cooperation: Lebanon supported counterterrorism efforts in regional organizations and participated in counterterrorism finance programs. The nation offered training to regional peers in international standards to combat terrorist financing. In February, Lebanon published in its official gazette that it would accede to the 1999 International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism.

ecoi.net summary:

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Austrian Red Cross

Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research
and Documentation (ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien

T (Telefon) +43 1 589 00 583

F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589

info@ecoi.net

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