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USDOS – US Department of State

Country Report on Terrorism 2017 - Chapter 1 - Egypt

Overview: In 2017, Egypt suffered numerous deadly terrorist attacks. Despite efforts by President Abdel Fatah Al Sisi’s government and the Egyptian Security Forces (ESF), especially in North Sinai, terrorist attacks remained persistent. ISIS affiliates, including ISIS-Sinai Province (ISIS-SP) and a distinct group calling itself Islamic State Egypt (IS Egypt), posed the most significant threat, as did groups such as Harakat Sawa’d Misr (HASM) and Liwa al-Thawra. For much of the year, these attacks primarily targeted Egyptian security personnel; however, on November 24, terrorists likely affiliated with ISIS killed more than 312 civilians at a Sufi mosque in North Sinai, resulting in the worst terrorist attack in Egypt’s history.

In April, the Egyptian government passed legislation facilitating the prosecution of terrorist cases. Egypt continued its efforts to combat the financing of terrorism and is a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and its Counter-ISIS Finance working group.

2017 Terrorist Incidents: ISIS affiliates and other terrorist groups carried out numerous attacks throughout Egypt, particularly in the Sinai. Methods included complex assaults involving dozens of terrorists, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), vehicle-borne IEDs, ambushes, kidnappings, and targeted assassinations. The following list details only a fraction of the incidents that occurred, particularly against Egyptian civilian and military security forces.

- Between late January and late February, terrorists threatened and targeted Copts in North Sinai, killing at least seven people and displacing more than a hundred Coptic families.
- On April 9, an IS Egypt suicide bomber killed 30 people and injured at least 70 during Palm Sunday services at a Coptic Church in Tanta. In a coordinated attack on the same day, another IS Egypt suicide bomber killed 16 people and injured 66 outside Saint Mark’s Church in Alexandria.
- On May 26, ISIS operatives killed 28 people and wounded 25 after gunmen opened fire on a bus carrying Coptic Christians near Minya.
- On July 7, suspected ISIS operatives detonated a car bomb at a police checkpoint and then engaged in heavy gunfire, killing 26 people and wounding more than 20 others in the village of al-Barth near Rafah.

- On October 16, terrorists robbed a local bank of approximately US \$1 million in local currency and traded gunfire with security forces in Al Arish, North Sinai, killing seven, including three civilians.
- On October 20, Ansar al-Islam, a new group with assessed links to al-Qa’ida, claimed responsibility for ambushing an ESF convoy near al-Bahariya Oasis in the Western Desert, killing at least 16 police officers and injuring 15, according to official statistics. Some press reports put the number of fatalities at more than 50 police officers.
- On November 24, in the deadliest terrorist attack in Egypt’s history, suspected ISIS-Sinai terrorists attacked a mosque in Al-Rawdah village in North Sinai, killing 312 people, including 27 children, and wounding 128. The attackers detonated explosives around the mosque when worshippers came out after Friday prayers and then engaged in gunfire.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: In April, parliament approved and the president ratified legislation eliminating some standard legal procedures and allowing for swifter prosecution in terrorism-related cases. The changes allow the detention of suspects without charge for a 14-day period, which is renewable once. Multiple media outlets and human rights groups criticized the government for using counterterrorism measures to crack down on political dissent.

The National Security Sector of the Ministry of Interior (MOI) is primarily responsible for counterterrorism functions in the Nile Valley but also works with other elements of the MOI, the Egyptian General Intelligence Service, and the Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF). There appeared to be limited interagency cooperation and information sharing among the relevant Egyptian government entities in 2017.

At border crossings and airports, Egyptian authorities checked for the presence of security features within 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 detailed information maintained by the security services.

Egypt’s most significant physical border security concerns were along the borders with Gaza and Libya, although smuggling remained a problem along the border with Sudan. There have been several attacks against ESF checkpoints in Upper Egypt, likely due to smugglers or terrorist groups moving through the area. The ESF continued to maintain the de-populated, 1.5-kilometer buffer zone along the border with Gaza. Egypt maintained an increased military presence along the Libya border.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Egypt is a member of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force, a Financial Action Task Force-style regional body. Egypt’s Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Combating Unit is a member of the Egmont Group.

The Egyptian government continued to improve its legal framework for countering terrorist financing. Egypt remains vulnerable to terrorist financing because of its large, informal, cash-based economy and proximity to several terrorist organizations. The Central Bank of Egypt and the Federation of Egyptian Banks have taken steps to encourage Egyptians to enter the formal financial sector. Despite legislative efforts, exploitation of banking technologies and social media for terrorism funding also remained an issue.

For further information on money laundering and financial crimes, see the *2018 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 (CVE): Egypt’s Dar Al-Iftaa, an official body that issues religious edicts, has taken the lead in CVE messaging via religious channels. Dar Al-Iftaa sends scholars to engage communities considered vulnerable to terrorist messaging. It also trains new muftis, organizes international outreach and speaking tours throughout Muslim majority countries and the West, publishes books and pamphlets to challenge the alleged religious foundations of terrorist ideology, runs rehabilitation sessions for former terrorists, and confronts terrorists in cyberspace. Dar Al-Iftaa also held an international conference in October on regulating fatwas as part of the government’s efforts to improve religious discourse against terrorist ideology. On November 15, the Supreme Council for Media Regulation, in coordination with Egypt’s religious institutions, issued a list of 50 religious scholars authorized to issue fatwas to curb aberrant fatwas and to counter extremist and radical ones.

Al-Azhar University continued to publish short posts related to tolerance and coexistence via its online platforms and co-sponsored a series of CVE conferences.

The Ministry of Islamic Endowments (Awqaf) is legally responsible for issuing guidance to which all imams throughout Egypt must adhere, including a weekly theme for Friday sermons. The Ministry also licenses all mosques in Egypt; however, many continued to operate without licenses. The Ministry has trained up to 250 female preachers as part of its outreach program to women who may be susceptible to terrorist recruitment. These preachers have teamed up with Christian nuns to promote religious dialogue. The government appoints and monitors the imams in licensed mosques and pays their salaries. In 2017, Awqaf published and translated numerous books on violent extremism and the protection of minorities, and it launched new initiatives to foster Muslim-Christian dialogue.

International and Regional Cooperation: Egypt continued to participate in the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), co-chairing the Criminal Justice and Rule of Law working group through September 2017. Egypt held a UN Security Council (UNSC) seat through the end of 2017 and presided over the UNSC Counter-Terrorism Committee. It is also a member of the African Union, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the Arab League. Starting in September 2017, Egypt served as the co-chair of the GCTF Capacity Building in the East Africa Region working group.

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Annual report on terrorism (covering 2017)



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