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Country Report on Terrorism 2020 - Chapter 1 - Lebanon

Overview: Lebanon is a committed partner in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. In 2020 the United States provided security assistance and training to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and worked with Lebanon’s law enforcement organizations, such as the Internal Security Forces (ISF), to enhance their counterterrorism capabilities and investigate and prosecute local terrorism cases.

Terrorist groups operating in Lebanon included U.S.-designated FTOs such as Hizballah and ISIS.

On September 29, Israel publicly released information about Hizballah’s efforts to manufacture precision-guided missiles (PGMs) in three residential areas of Beirut. Hizballah denied that these locations were PGM factories. In remarks on December 27, Hizballah leader Hassan Nasrallah claimed the terrorist group had doubled the size of its PGM arsenal in 2020.

Despite the Lebanese government’s official policy of disassociation from regional conflicts, Hizballah continued its illegitimate military activities in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. Separately, Lebanon’s 12 Palestinian refugee camps remained largely outside the control of Lebanese security forces and posed a security threat owing to the potential for militant recruitment and terrorist infiltration. In addition, several individuals on the FBI’s most wanted list or listed by the Department of State or Department of Treasury as Specially Designated Global Terrorists reportedly remained in Lebanon.

2020 Terrorist Incidents: Hizballah continues to plan attacks and engage in other illicit activities around the world. The following is a representative list of terrorist incidents in Lebanon:

- On September 27, two LAF soldiers were killed and another injured when two terrorists of unspecified affiliation opened fire on an LAF sentry post in the Minieh region of northern Lebanon. One terrorist escaped, but another was killed by the LAF and subsequently found to be wearing a suicide vest.
- On August 21, militants led by ISIS-affiliated terrorist Khaled al-Talawi killed two police officers and one civilian in the northern Lebanese town of Kafroun. The LAF subsequently apprehended and killed al-Talawi on September 13 near Tripoli; four LAF soldiers were killed in that raid. On September 26, LAF and ISF units engaged militants linked to al-Talawi in the Wadi Khaled region of northern Lebanon, killing 14 terrorists and arresting 15 others.
- On August 25 the Israeli Defense Forces claimed that Hizballah fighters fired small arms across the Blue Line toward an IDF position in the Israeli town of Manara.

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. No new laws related to terrorism were passed in 2020. The LAF, the ISF, the Directorate of General Security (DGS), and the General Directorate of State Security were the primary government agencies responsible for counterterrorism. Although cooperation between the services was inconsistent, they took steps to improve information sharing and were receptive to additional capacity building and reforms. Structural limitations in the justice system remained a barrier for conducting trials on terrorism cases in a timely manner. The Department of State funded programs to provide training to law enforcement on counterterrorism skills. There were no indications that the government’s counterterrorism actions were misused to suppress political opposition or dissent.

The LAF held primary responsibility for securing Lebanon’s land and maritime borders, while DGS and Customs were responsible for official points of entry — though Hizballah maintained control of some informal border crossings and is widely believed to exercise influence at Beirut’s Rafik Hariri International Airport and the Port of Beirut. The LAF improved its ability to control Lebanon’s land border with Syria through the Land Border Security Project funded by the United States, the UK, and Canada. This project resulted in enhanced monitoring of the border and the arrest of ISIS members entering Lebanon from Syria.

Lebanon collected biographical data for travelers at the Beirut International Airport, PNR data for commercial flights, and API. The LAF supported a visit by Department of State -funded assessors to three ports of entry to assess cargo security protocols in 2020. The ISF neared completion of a Department of State-funded project to increase the

ISF’s biometric collection and storage capabilities, which will also give the ISF the capability to share biometric data with other Lebanese security services. Lebanese security services collaborated with the United States on numerous instances to investigate individuals involved in terrorism.

The presence of Hizballah in the Lebanese government continues to impede effective government action against terrorist incidents associated with Hizballah. For instance, despite repeated requests by the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to gain access to private properties in southern Lebanon — from which Hizballah is suspected to have dug cross-border tunnels into Israel or housed or manufactured weapons — the Government of Lebanon declined to permit UNIFIL to investigate these areas. In international fora, Lebanon argued that acts taken against what it characterized as “foreign occupation” are not terrorism. This characterization was used to justify Hizballah’s acts against Israel as resistance to occupation rather than terrorism. In December the Netherlands-based Special Tribunal for Lebanon sentenced in absentia Hizballah terrorist Salim Ayyash for the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Ayyash remains at large.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Lebanon is a member of MENAFATF. Its FIU, the Special Investigation Commission (SIC), is a member of the Egmont Group. Lebanon is also a member of the Defeat-ISIS Coalition’s CIFG.

In 2020 the SIC supported the implementation of terrorism-related sanctions against numerous Hizballah members and financiers, including the sanctioning of two Lebanese companies subordinate to Hizballah’s Executive Council. The SIC also took actions in response to the U.S. government’s implementing sanctions against former government ministers Yusuf Finyanus and Ali Hassan Khalil for material support to Hizballah.

During the first nine months of 2020, the SIC received 13 terrorism and terrorism-financing cases. The SIC reported that Lebanon designated 117 individuals and 15 entities on its national terrorism-financing list in 2020. On October 8, one referral from Lebanon to the UNSCR 1267/2253 Sanctions Committee was officially designated.

Countering Violent Extremism: Lebanon published its national strategy for preventing violent extremism (PVE) in 2018. The National PVE Coordination Unit organized a series of workshops in 2019 to solicit inputs for a PVE national action plan (NAP) for implementation of the strategy. Owing to COVID-19 and delays in government formation in 2020, the NAP has not yet been endorsed by the Cabinet. In the meantime, local and international donor efforts in CVE included participation in the Strong Cities Network, which works to build early warning capacity in select Lebanese municipalities, as well as programs in prisons to reduce risks of radicalization to violence.

International and Regional Cooperation: Lebanon supported counterterrorism efforts in regional organizations and participated in counterterrorism finance programs.

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