

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	328
Land:	Libyen
Kilde:	US Department of State
Titel:	Country Report on terrorism 2018 - Chapter 1 - Libya
Udgivet:	1. november 2019
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	30. januar 2020

Document #2019344

USDOS – US Department of State

Country Report on Terrorism 2018 - Chapter 1 - Libya

Overview: Libya’s UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) was a reliable counterterrorism partner in 2018, participated in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, and continued to work with the United States to counter the spread of terrorist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant-Libya (ISIL-Libya) and al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Terrorist groups continued to exploit the country’s political instability and limited government presence, and some groups have integrated themselves within local communities – particularly in the South. Libya was the target of dozens of terrorist attacks in 2018. Through coordination with the GNA, the United States conducted periodic precision airstrikes on ISIL-Libya and AQIM cells. The GNA continued to cooperate with the United States on the investigation of suspected terrorists. The eastern Libya-based Libyan National Army (LNA) announced in June that a military operation had cleared the city of Derna of extremist fighters. The LNA, led by General Khalifa Haftar and not aligned with the GNA, has expressed the goal of ridding Libya of terrorist groups.

2018 Terrorist Incidents: ISIL-Libya and al-Qa’ida-aligned terrorists carried out dozens of attacks throughout 2018. Methods included suicide bombings, VBIEDs, ambushes, kidnappings, and targeted assassinations. The following is a partial list of terrorist incidents that occurred in 2018:

- On May 2, ISIS fighters attacked the High National Electoral Commission headquarters in Tripoli, killing 11 people.
- On September 10, ISIS fighters attacked the offices of the National Oil Corporation in Tripoli, killing two staff members.
- On November 24, ISIS fighters attacked a police station in the southeastern town of Tazirbu, killing eight police officers and kidnapping 11 individuals.
- On December 25, ISIS operatives conducted an attack against the Libyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tripoli, killing three people.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: Libya lacks a comprehensive counterterrorism law, although the Libyan penal code criminalizes offenses that may threaten national security, including terrorism, the promotion of terrorist acts, and the handling of money in support of such acts. Libya has ratified the AU’s Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, which requires states to criminalize terrorist acts under their national laws.

The GNA continued to support and seek international cooperation to combat ISIS. The GNA conducted consultations to develop a counterterrorism strategy, including a planning conference supported by the United Kingdom and the EU, but had not passed any legislation by the end of 2018.

A multitude of organizations under the GNA claimed counterterrorism responsibilities, such as the Counterterrorism Unit, the Counterterrorism Task Force (CTTF), the Central Investigations Division, the General Investigations Division, and the Libyan Intelligence Service. Because of the limited reach of these organizations, however, they were not effective in deterring or reducing terrorist activities beyond their localized areas of control. Libyan law enforcement personnel lacked clear mandates and the capacity to detect, deter, respond to, or investigate terrorist incidents because of continued political and security force fragmentation. The CTTF has begun efforts to work with foreign partner forces to train and build capacity to counter terrorist activity in Tripoli and areas around Misrata.

In many parts of Libya, armed groups, rather than state institutions, provide security and law enforcement functions, including detaining terrorist elements. National police and security forces are fragmented, are inadequately trained and equipped, and lack clear reporting chains and coordination mechanisms. Libya’s military forces are similarly weak and fragmented. Non-state armed groups often overmatch formal security structures.

The Libyan government lacked a comprehensive border management strategy and was unable to secure the country’s thousands of miles of land and maritime borders, enabling the illicit flow of fuel, goods, weapons, antiquities, narcotics, migrants, and FTFs that pose serious security challenges to the region. The GNA has requested international support to enhance its border security capacity and has participated in discussions with its southern neighbors to improve security and monitoring along Libya’s southern borders.

Security at Libya’s airports is minimal, with limited use of PNR systems or biometric technology. Libya, however, is working with the Department of State to enhance security measures, to include biometric screening, at Tripoli’s Mitiga International Airport. The Department of State provided training to Libyan airport officials, border guards, customs agents, and police forces, in securing airports against the threat of terrorism, which included preventive security measures consisting of access control, passenger and cabin baggage screening, hold baggage screening, and air and mail cargo handling. Libya lacked the resources, manpower, and training to conduct sufficient maritime patrols to interdict or dissuade illicit maritime trafficking and irregular migration, although Italy and the European Union worked with the Libyan Naval Coastguard to increase the effectiveness of the organization, including command and control.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Libya is a member of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF) and the Defeat-ISIS Coalition’s Counter-ISIS Finance Group. Libya’s Minister of Interior made public statements and bilateral requests to develop counter-terrorism financing legislation and capacities.

Countering Violent Extremism: There were no significant changes in 2018.

Regional and International Cooperation: Many international organizations and diplomatic missions have reestablished a limited presence in Tripoli, since nearly all evacuated the capital in 2014. Other countries and organizations maintain a permanent presence in Tunis, Tunisia. The political conflict and limited international presence in Libya severely restricted counterterrorism cooperation. International assistance, including U.S. government-provided training on airport security and land border management, increased in 2018. Other border security initiatives – through the EU Border Assistance Mission, UNDP and UNODC – focused on improving policing and criminal justice functions and counterterrorism legislation and legal frameworks. Libya is a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Arab League, and has participated in meetings of the GCTF’s West Africa Regional Capacity-Building Working Group.

ecoi.net summary:

Annual report on terrorism (covering 2018)



Country:

Libya

Source:

USDOS – US Department of State [\(/en/source/11558.html\)](/en/source/11558.html)

Original link (no longer valid):

~~<https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2018/#Libya>~~

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Published:

1 November 2019

Document ID:

2019344

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ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

