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Country Report on Terrorism 2019 - Chapter 1 - Lebanon

Overview: Lebanon remains a committed partner in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS.

Terrorist groups operating in Lebanon included Hizballah, ISIS, Hamas, and the Abdullah Azzam Brigades. Of these, the Lebanon-based and Iran-backed terrorist group Hizballah remained the most capable. In August 2019, Israel publicly released information about Hizballah's efforts to produce precision-guided missiles (PGMs) within Lebanon. Hizballah announced that the group possessed enough PGMs for a confrontation with Israel but denied that it was developing PGM factories in Lebanon. Between December 2018 and January 2019, Israel uncovered and destroyed multiple tunnels dug by Hizballah under the border into Israel that could have been used for terrorist attacks.

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

2019 Terrorist Incidents:

- On June 3, Abdel Rahman Mabsout, a lone Lebanese gunman associated with ISIS, attacked a police patrol in Tripoli and killed two Internal Security Forces (ISF) officers and two Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) soldiers before killing himself after being cornered by security forces. The attacker was previously arrested in 2016 for fighting for ISIS in Syria and imprisoned in Lebanon but was released in late 2017.
- On September 1, Hizballah launched three guided antitank missiles across the border into Israel at an IDF vehicle. The missiles did not cause any casualties.
- 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. No new laws related to terrorism were passed in 2019. The LAF, ISF, the Directorate of General Security (DGS), and the General Directorate of State Security were the primary government agencies responsible for counterterrorism. Although cooperation among 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 for terrorism cases in a timely manner.

The LAF held primary responsibility for securing Lebanon's land and maritime borders, while DGS and Customs were responsible for official points of entry. 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 greater control of the border and the arrest of ISIS members entering Lebanon from Syria. In February, the LAF arrested a Palestinian affiliated with the al-Nusrah Front for his role in fighting taking place inside the Ein el-Hilweh Refugee Camp.

Lebanon collected biographic data for travelers at the Beirut International Airport, as well as API and PNR data for commercial flights. The United States worked with Lebanon to develop a central repository to process and share biometric data among Lebanese services. In 2019, Lebanese security services collaborated with the United States on numerous instances to foil terrorist plots and investigate and apprehend individuals involved in terrorism.

The presence of Hizballah in the Lebanese government was an impediment to effective host government action against terrorist incidents. For instance, the government took no action to hold Hizballah accountable for its rocket attack on Israel in September or the cross-border tunnels, and prevented the UN Interim Force in Lebanon from fully investigating these incidents by failing to provide access to the areas where these incidents occurred. In international fora, Lebanon argued that acts taken against what it characterized as “foreign occupation” are not terrorism, in an attempt to justify Hizballah’s violence against Israel.

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

In 2019, the SIC took actions to comply with new U.S. sanctions against a number of Hizballah members and financiers, including the sanctioning of Jammal Trust Bank for providing financial services to Hizballah. Lebanon also designated several individuals and entities on its national terrorism-financing list established pursuant to UNSCR 1373/2001 and proposed several designations to the UNSCR 1267/2253 Sanctions Committee. Lebanese authorities were still compiling specific statistics on such actions at year’s end.

During the first nine months of the year, the SIC received 12 terrorism and terrorism-financing cases from local sources, out of which six cases were referred to the general prosecutor. The SIC reported that numerous terrorism and terrorism-financing prosecutions were carried out by judicial authorities in Lebanon, several of which led to convictions.

On August 29, Lebanon acceded to the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism. However, it submitted a reservation concerning the definition of terrorism to endorse the definition from the Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism of 1984, which excludes any acts taken against what is characterized as “foreign occupation.”

Countering Violent Extremism: The National Preventing Violent Extremism Coordination Unit organized nine workshops on PVE in 2019. Local and international donor efforts included participation in the SCN, as well as prevention programs in prisons.

International and Regional Cooperation: Lebanon supported CT efforts in regional organizations and participated in counterterrorism finance programs, such as MENAFATF. Lebanon offered training to regional peers in international standards to combat terrorist financing.

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