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Overview: Lebanon's security situation deteriorated in 2014 as a result of worsening spillover from the violence in Syria and the involvement of Lebanese fighters in the conflict, including Hizballah, which had fully mobilized in support of the Asad regime, and to a lesser extent individual Lebanese who supported various anti-regime forces. Incursions by Syria-based Sunni extremists into Lebanon in 2014 underscored both the centrality of border security to Lebanon's stability and importance of enabling the Lebanese government to exercise its full sovereignty, as mandated by UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1701. Various branches of the Lebanese state, including the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), Internal Security Forces (ISF), and Central Bank continued to cooperate with international partners in countering terrorism and have scored some notable successes in the disruption of terrorist networks and combating militant forces. U.S. programs are meant to enhance the Lebanese state's capacity to exercise sovereignty over all Lebanese territory, including its borders.

Border security and spillover from the Syrian conflict remained an immediate, pressing terrorism problem. In retaliation for Hizballah's actions supporting the Asad regime, Sunni militant groups have carried out more than two dozen suicide attacks against Shia population centers and LAF targets from June 2013 through the end of 2014. Although these attacks declined in the second half of 2014 due to the Lebanese security services' success at disrupting terrorist networks, Syria-based Sunni extremist groups infiltrated and sought to control Lebanese territory. Al-Nusrah Front and the Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL) battled the LAF for control of the Lebanese border town of Arsal in August, before retreating into the nearby hills with more than 30 captured LAF and ISF personnel, four of whom were subsequently killed. The army faced additional attacks in late October in Tripoli by al-Nusrah Front and ISIL-inspired Sunni militants, some of whom professed a desire to establish an ISIL principality in northern Lebanon.

Lebanon's security institutions, including the LAF and ISF, came under considerable pressure to end these attacks, a daunting task made all the more difficult by the country's political and sectarian divisions and its refugee crisis. Lebanon, a country of approximately four million, hosted more than 1.1 million refugees from Syria at the end of 2014. Lebanese authorities were challenged not only by the significant burden the refugees place on its financial and natural resources, infrastructure, and host communities, but also by fears of potential militant recruiting among the refugee population. Al-Nusrah Front and ISIL's use of informal refugee settlements during the Arsal attacks further hardened Lebanese attitudes towards Syrian refugees.

Despite these challenges, the Lebanese security institutions improved their capacity to detect and intercept terrorist attacks, resulting in the disruption of at least three major terrorist networks and more than a dozen high-profile arrests in 2014. Furthermore, the successful implementation of the Tripoli security plan gave the LAF complete control over the city for the first time since the early 1970s. The United States remains Lebanon's closest counterterrorism partner, and the bilateral relationship is robust and growing. The focus of U.S. assistance was to strengthen Lebanon's security institutions so they can better exert sovereign authority and maintain border security in accordance with UNSCR 1701 and counter both domestic and foreign terrorist threats.

Hizballah, with considerable support from Iran, remains the most capable and prominent terrorist group in Lebanon, enjoying popular support among Lebanese Shia and some Christians. Hizballah continued to operate as an armed militia beyond the control of the state and as a powerful political actor that can hobble or topple the government as it sees fit. The government was not able to take significant action to disarm Hizballah or eliminate its safe havens in Lebanon. Despite Lebanon's official dissociation policy regarding the Syrian conflict, Hizballah accelerated its military role in support of the Syrian regime in 2014 and has proved to be a decisive force in the Syrian regime's ability to retake major swaths of territory from Syrian opposition forces.

Hizballah's actions in Syria have exacerbated the already tenuous security situation inside Lebanon. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has had a presence in Lebanon since the early 1980s and coordinates closely with Hizballah on military operations and training. Hizballah engaged in terrorist activity against Israel in violation of UNSCR 1701 on October 7, when it detonated a roadside bomb in the Shebaa Farms area south of the Blue Line, injuring two Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers. It was the first time since 2006 Hizballah claimed responsibility for an attack against the IDF.

Other designated terrorist groups, including Hamas, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine General Command, Asbat al-Ansar, Fatah al-Islam, Fatah al-Intifada, Jund al-Sham, Palestine Islamic Jihad, the Abdullah Azzam Brigades (AAB), and several other groups, continued to operate within Lebanon's borders, including within Lebanon's 12 Palestinian refugee camps. The LAF did not maintain a presence in the camps, but it conducted limited operations and patrols near the camps to counter terrorist threats, including attempts to launch rockets against Israel from southern Lebanon. The UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) reported that a total of 18 rockets were launched from southern Lebanon towards Israel over nine different occasions in July and August, with a total of nine rockets hitting Israel and, in one case, injuring two Israeli civilians. UNIFIL concluded that the attacks were the work of "amateur operators" and were likely aimed at expressing solidarity with Gaza during Israel's "Protective Edge" military operation from July 8 to August 26.

Lebanon is a member of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL. The Lebanese security forces seek to limit ISIL's threat at home, including the flow of foreign fighters both to and from Syria, by working to secure the porous, ungoverned border with Syria and conducting counterterrorism operations within Lebanon. The LAF and other security services were actively engaged in monitoring potential ISIL and al-Nusrah Front elements in Lebanon, disrupting their activities and networks, and arresting those suspected of plotting terrorist attacks. The government is expanding its efforts to counter ISIL messaging. The Lebanese government supports UNSCRs 2170 and 2178 and has increased security measures at airports and border crossings to prevent the flow of ISIL and al-Nusrah Front fighters to Syria and Iraq. The government was not in full compliance with UNSCR 2178 at year's end, however, since it has not taken significant action to prevent Hizballah from sending its fighters to Syria and Iraq.

2014 Terrorist Incidents: Representative terrorist incidents in Lebanon included:

- On January 2, a suicide car bombing in the Hizballah-dominated Beirut suburb of Haret Hreik killed four people and injured 77. ISIL claimed responsibility for the attack.
- On January 6, a suicide car bombing killed five people and wounded 42 others in the northeastern border town of Hermel. Al-Nusrah Front claimed responsibility for the attack.
- On January 21, a suicide car bombing just 50 meters from the January 2 suicide bombing killed four people and wounded 46 others. Al-Nusrah Front claimed responsibility for this attack.
- On February 22, a suicide bomber blew himself up at a LAF checkpoint in Hermel, killing three people, including two soldiers, and injuring more than 10 others. Al-Nusrah Front claimed responsibility for the bombing.
- On February 19, at least 19 people were killed and dozens injured after two vehicle-borne suicide bombs exploded near an Iranian cultural center in the Beirut suburb of Beir Hassan, an area closely associated with Hizballah. A Twitter account linked to the AAB claimed responsibility for the bombings.
- On March 29, three LAF soldiers were killed and four others wounded by a car bomb targeting an army checkpoint near Aarsal. An obscure militant group calling itself the Free Sunnis of Baalbek claimed responsibility for the attack on its Twitter account.
- On June 20, a suicide bomber targeted an ISF checkpoint in the Bekaa area of Dahr al-Baydar, killing one ISF member and injured 32 people.
- On August 2-7, al-Nusrah Front and ISIL militants attacked LAF positions near Aarsal and briefly gained control of the town, following the arrest of ISIL leader Imad Ahmed Joumaa. After several days of heavy fighting, the LAF repelled the militants, who retreated into the nearby hills with more than 30 captured LAF and ISF personnel. The clashes left 17 soldiers dead and nearly 200 wounded, along with approximately 40 civilians killed and 400 wounded.
- On August 28 and September 6, ISIL beheaded two LAF soldiers taken hostage in Aarsal. Al-Nusrah Front also killed two Lebanese servicemen hostages, a LAF soldier on September 19 and an ISF policeman on December 5.
- On October 7, Hizballah detonated a roadside bomb in the Shebaa Farms area south of the Blue Line, injuring two IDF soldiers.
- On October 26-27, Sunni militants attacked LAF positions in Tripoli following the arrest of Ahmed Salim Mikati, a local terrorist suspect with ties to ISIL, resulting in the deaths of 11 soldiers, eight civilians, and 22 terrorists.
- On December 2, armed militants killed six LAF soldiers and wounded another in an ambush near Ras Baalbek.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: Lebanon does not have a comprehensive counterterrorism law, but several articles of Lebanon's criminal code (1943) are used to prosecute acts of terrorism. Implementation of these articles has at times been hindered by Lebanon's complex political and confessional system, however, and also by Hizballah restricting access to attack sites that were within areas under its control. The cabinet did not consider legislative initiatives that could potentially threaten Hizballah's operations, as the presence of Hizballah and its political allies in the government make the requisite consensus on such actions impossible.

Several agencies focused on combating terrorism, although cooperation among the services was inconsistent. Lebanon has been a participant in the Department of State's Antiterrorism Assistance program since 2006; this assistance has focused on border security as well as on building law enforcement's investigative and leadership capabilities. The Department of State's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) has also provided assistance to improve the capabilities of the ISF through a multi-year program that includes construction of training facilities and establishment of a secure radio communications system; provision of vehicles, protective gear, and other types of equipment; and a wide range of training and mentoring activities. INL also provides corrections training to bolster the ISF's limited capacity to manage its overcrowded prisons. The ISF has worked to prevent terrorist recruitment and the direction of terrorist activities by prison inmates who, in many cases, have complete control of certain cell blocks, and access to cell phones and the internet.

INL and the FBI conducted a biometric assessment for the ISF in March and at year's end were reviewing the findings and considering potential projects with the ISF to enhance its biometric capabilities. Lebanon did not have biometric systems in place at the official points of entry into the country. Lebanese passports were machine readable, and the government was considering the adoption of biometric passports. The DGS, under the Interior Ministry, controls immigration and passport services, and it uses an electronic database to collect biographic data for travelers at all points of entry.

The Lebanese security services disrupted multiple terrorist networks and made several high-profile arrests in 2014. On February 12, the LAF arrested Naim Abbas, an AAB commander with ties to al-Nusrah Front, who was alleged to be behind the January 2 and January 21 bombings in Haret Hreik. On June 20 and 25, Lebanese security forces raided two Beirut hotels and detained at least a dozen terrorism suspects, including foreign nationals from Pakistan, France, and Saudi Arabia. During the June 25 raid at the Duroy Hotel, a Saudi suicide bomber blew himself up in his room to avoid arrest. The Lebanese Military Court issued a November 7 indictment against the suspects in the hotel arrests, stating that they planned to carry out attacks against Shia targets in Lebanon.

On December 5, the Lebanese Military Court postponed trial proceedings until June 2015 in the case against Michel Samaha, a former Lebanese Information Minister arrested on terrorism charges in 2012. The delay came after General Ali Mamlouk, the head of the Syrian National Security Bureau, failed to report to the court in accordance with a 2013 arrest warrant. Samaha and Mamlouk face charges of "transporting explosives from Syria to Lebanon in an attempt to assassinate Lebanese political and religious leaders." If convicted, they face the death penalty.

The United States maintains close ties with the Lebanese security services and could expect significant investigative and legal support in any terrorism case affecting U.S. citizens or interests. Lebanese authorities maintained that amnesty for Lebanese involved in acts of violence during the 1975-90 civil wars prevented terrorism prosecutions of concern to the United States.

The LAF partnered with several friendly nations on a bilateral basis to receive training programs that focused on strengthening its counterterrorism capabilities.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Lebanon is a member of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force, a Financial Action Task Force-style regional body. Lebanon's Central Bank, the Banque du Liban, issued two circulars in 2014 to improve its anti-money laundering/countering the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) regime:

- Intermediate Circular No. 371 dated September 11, amending Basic Circular No. 83 dated May 18, 2005, required banks to establish an AML/CFT Branch officer in each branch and to set up additional compliance units within individual banks.

- Special Investigation Commission (SIC) Circular No. 17 dated September 16, requested banks to report suspicious transactions electronically to the SIC.

In 2014, the ISF received one request for assistance with a terrorism case from Interpol and had begun an investigation. The SIC, Lebanon's financial intelligence unit, is an independent legal entity empowered to investigate suspicious financial transactions and to freeze assets, and is a member of the Egmont Group of Financial Intelligence Units. The SIC reported that it had received three cases in 2014, two from the Directorate of General Security (DGS) and one from a local bank, regarding individuals with alleged terrorism ties. The SIC froze the individuals' financial assets (amounts undisclosed) in Lebanon's banking sector and forwarded the cases to the public prosecutor for further investigation. Neither the SIC nor the ISF received any allegations of suspicious financial transactions that led to terrorist financing cases in 2014.

Hizballah continued to work internationally to further its agenda. Lebanese nationals in Latin America and Africa continued to provide financial support to Hizballah, including through the laundering of criminal proceeds using Lebanese financial institutions. Requests for designation or asset freezes regarding Hizballah and affiliated groups are sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but the Lebanese government does not require banks to freeze these assets, because it does not consider Hizballah a terrorist organization. However, following the U.S. Treasury designation in July of Stars Group Holding for ties to Hizballah, several Lebanese banks, of their own accord, closed the bank accounts of this group and related parties.

NGOs are required by law to submit a yearly financial statement to the government, but are not obliged to file suspicious transaction reports to prevent terrorist financing. However, the banking sector subjects NGOs to enhanced due diligence and reports suspicious transactions to the SIC. Monitoring the finances and management of all registered NGOs is the responsibility of the Interior Ministry, but it was inconsistent in applying these controls.

For further information on money laundering and financial crimes, see the *2014 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR), Volume 2, Money Laundering and Financial Crimes*: <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/index.htm>.

Regional and International Cooperation: Lebanon is a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and attended Global Counterterrorism Forum meetings. Although Lebanon was a co-sponsor of UNSCR 2178 regarding foreign terrorist fighters, the government is not in full compliance since it did not take significant action to prevent Hizballah from sending its fighters to Syria. Lebanon continued to voice its commitment to fulfilling other relevant UNSCRs, including 1559, 1680, and 1701. The Special Tribunal for Lebanon, an international body investigating the 2005 assassination of PM Rafiq Hariri, received Lebanon's annual contribution of approximately US \$37.5 million on November 5.

Countering Radicalization to Violence and Violent Extremism: Several government institutions have programs that seek to counter violent extremism (CVE), but there is no overall national strategy in place. The Interior Ministry, primarily through the ISF, has the most robust CVE programs and is partnering with the LAF and DGS to develop a social media strategy that would specifically target Sunni youth who are vulnerable to extremist recruitment. The ISF cybersecurity chief and a representative from the Foreign Affairs Ministry attended the October 27 sub-ministerial conference on counter-ISIL strategic communications in Kuwait.

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