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USDOS – US Department of State

Country Report on Terrorism 2017 - Chapter 1 - Tunisia

Overview: The risk of terrorist activity in Tunisia remained high in 2017, including the potential for terrorist attacks and the movement of arms and terrorists from neighboring countries. In 2017, al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)-aligned Uqba bin Nafi’ Battalion and ISIS-affiliated groups continued small-scale attacks against Tunisian security personnel. Tunisian security forces improved, however, their ability to preempt terrorist activities. There were no major terrorist attacks in Tunisia in 2017. The last terrorist attack on tourists occurred on June 26, 2015.

The government has made counterterrorism a top priority, and Tunisia continued to cooperate with the international community, including the United States, to professionalize its security apparatus. U.S. security assistance to Tunisia grew in 2017, but Tunisia needs more time and international support to complete the overhaul of its military and civilian security forces.

Instability in Libya has allowed terrorist groups, including ISIS, to continue cross-border smuggling operations, although there were no reported terrorist attacks in 2017 originating from Libya. The last major attack came in March 2016 in the border town of Ben Guerdan. The disproportionate numbers of Tunisians who previously travelled to fight in Syria and Iraq – and their potential return – remains a cause for concern.

2017 Terrorist Incidents: Terrorist organizations were active in Tunisia throughout the year but there were no attacks against foreigners or civilians. There were also no large-scale attacks against Tunisian security personnel. The list below highlights the most significant terrorist incidents of 2017.

- On March 12, four motorcyclists attacked a security checkpoint in the Tunisian city of Kebili, killing one guard. Two attackers were killed in the ensuing shootout and the two remaining terrorists were captured. A Tunisian bystander assisted the police during the attack by stopping one of the terrorists from reaching his motorcycle to detonate explosives.
- On November 1, two policemen were attacked by a man wielding a knife outside Parliament. One of the officers died November 2 from his wounds. The attacker was apprehended shortly after the assault. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack.

- On November 6, three Tunisian soldiers were wounded by explosive devices planted by terrorists on Mt. Chaambi.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: There has been significant improvement in protecting tourism zones. The collaboration and cooperation between security forces, private security, and hotel staff has notably improved with training provided by international partners. As a result of significant improvements in soft target, aviation and maritime security, the United Kingdom and other European governments removed their travel restrictions for Tunisia. In addition, the return of cruise ship tourism and increasing volume at major tourist sites are preliminary indications of the successful application of proactive preventative measures throughout Tunisia.

Border security remained a priority, and interdiction and border security capabilities have improved as a result of international support through training and equipping of Tunisian border forces. Tunisia has received support from Germany and the United States to install electronic surveillance equipment to augment Tunisian-built berms along its border with Libya.

The government’s counterterrorism efforts have expanded considerably in the last year, with successful weapons seizures, arrests, and operations against armed groups throughout the country. Significant law enforcement actions and arrests included:

- On April 30, Tunisian security forces killed Algerian terrorist Abu Sufian al-Sufi during an operation in Sidi Bouzid.
- On May 31, weapons and equipment were seized in a terrorist camp during a military operation on Mount Sammama in Kasserine governorate. The armed forces seized a Kalashnikov, 90 cartridges, equipment to manufacture explosives, and six landmines.
- On November 28, Tunisian military units engaged a group of terrorists in the Kasserine Mountains, killing terrorist Yahya Argoubi, alias Abi Talha, whom the Ministry of the Interior described as one of the most wanted terrorists in Tunisia.

Tunisian security personnel continued to participate in the Department of State’s Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) program and additional training funded through the Department of State’s Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund (CTPF). Ministry of Interior personnel received ATA/CTPF training in the areas of tactical crisis response, counterterrorism investigations, protection of soft targets, the mitigation of improvised explosive devices and other explosive ordnance disposal threats, and command and control. Primary intervention operational units were granted tactical and enabling equipment. Department of State programs supported improved quality and access to justice, training for and implementation of new criminal codes, improved prison functionality, and other training and assistance for the Ministry of Justice. In close collaboration with the MOI, the Department of State is implementing a US \$12 million new police academy modernization project that includes curriculum development. U.S. programs also provided the Ministries of Interior and Justice with armored vehicles,

ambulances, surveillance cameras, and other equipment to enhance internal and border security. The Tunisian Armed Forces consider counterterrorism and border security their principal mission, and they have successfully employed U.S.-funded patrol craft, vehicles, weapons, and training in border security and counterterrorism operations.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Tunisia is a member of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force, a Financial Action Task Force (FATF)-style regional body, and the country’s Tunisian Financial Analysis Committee intelligence unit is a member of the Egmont Group. While Tunisia has endeavored to implement anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) mechanisms, FATF categorized the country as having strategic deficiencies in November. Tunisia developed an action plan to address these gaps. It included: (1) implementing risk-based supervision of the financial sector and integrating designated non-financial businesses and professions into the AML/CFT regime; (2) maintaining comprehensive commercial registries and strengthening penalties for transparency violations; (3) increasing the efficiency with which CTAF processes suspicious transaction reports ; (4) establishing a terrorism-related targeted financial sanctions regime; and (5) establishing WMD-related targeted financial sanctions. 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): Tunisia made a concerted effort to improve socioeconomic conditions in the country through economic development and education programs to prevent conditions that terrorists can exploit for recruitment. The government also attempted to prevent the radicalization of Tunisians by minimizing their exposure to inflammatory rhetoric in mosques by replacing imams deemed extremist, although local populations in several cases resisted the changes. The National Counterterrorism Strategy reportedly expanded the fight against terrorism to all ministries, including those that focus on culture, education, media, and religious affairs, and assigned each ministry concrete actions to accomplish. Tunisia is a founding member of the Strong Cities Network.

International and Regional Cooperation: Tunisia participates in multinational and regional efforts to counter terrorism, such as those at the United Nations, the Arab League, the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), and the African Union. It is a founding member of the GCTF-inspired International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law (IJJ), and it participated in numerous IJJ trainings and workshops focused on improving criminal justice actors’ capacity to prevent and address terrorism-related crimes. In December, Tunisia co-sponsored UN Security Council resolution 2396 on returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters.

Tunisia is an active member of the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, a U.S. multi-year interagency regional program aimed at building the capacity of governments in the Maghreb and Sahel to confront terrorist threats. Tunisia is also part of the Security Governance Initiative. Tunisian authorities continued their coordination on border security with Algerian counterparts.

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