

Chapter 4: Terrorist Safe Havens (Update to 7120 Report)

Terrorist safe havens described in this report include ungoverned, under-governed, or ill-governed physical areas where terrorists are able to organize, plan, raise funds, communicate, recruit, train, transit, and operate in relative security because of inadequate governance capacity, political will, or both.

As defined by section 2656f(d) of Title 22 of the U.S. Code, the terms “terrorist sanctuary” and “sanctuary” exclude the territory of a country the government of which is subject to a determination under section 4605(j)(1)(A) of Title 50 [deemed under Section 1768(c)(2) of the National Defense Authorization Act of Fiscal Year 2019 (NDAA FY19) to refer to section 1754(c) of the NDAA FY19 as of August 13, 2018]; section 2371(a) of Title 22; or section 2780(d) of Title 22. (For information regarding the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Iran, Sudan, and Syria, see Chapter 2, State Sponsors of Terrorism.)

TERRORIST SAFE HAVENS

AFRICA

Somalia. In 2019, terrorists used under-governed areas throughout Somalia as safe havens to plan, conduct, and facilitate operations within Somalia, including mass-casualty bombings in major urban areas, and attacks in neighboring countries. The Federal Government of Somalia’s Comprehensive Approach to Security partnership with the international community includes military, law enforcement, and CVE-specific “strands” to ameliorate Somalia’s security challenges at the federal, state (federal member state), and local levels. Somali law enforcement took several actions in 2019 that led to prosecutions of individuals suspected of terrorism-related activities. However, Somali officials failed to implement vital national security reforms and pass legislation that could help enhance the government’s capacity to secure and govern effectively at all levels. Despite these critical gaps in its counterterrorism strategy, the Somali government remained a committed partner and vocal advocate for U.S. counterterrorism efforts.

With the notable exception of targeted operations carried out by U.S.-trained and -equipped units of Somali military forces, the Somali National Army as a whole remained incapable of independently securing and retaking towns from al-Shabaab. This critical gap allowed al-Shabaab to continue to extort local populations and forcibly recruit fighters, some of whom were children.

As seen in previous years, al-Shabaab kept some of its safe haven in the Jubba River Valley as a primary base of operations for plotting and launching attacks. The group retained control of several towns throughout the Jubaland region, including Jilib and Kunyo Barow, and maintained operations in the Gedo region to exploit the porous Kenya-Somalia border and attack targets in Kenya. The Kenyan government maintains a strong presence throughout the border region. In northern Somalia, ISIS-linked fighters used the limited safe haven they established in Puntland to launch small-scale attacks.

Somalia remained heavily dependent on regional and international partners to support almost all major security functions throughout the country, making little progress on improving interagency coordination to limit terrorist transit through the country.

According to independent sources and non-governmental organizations engaged in demining activities on the ground, there was little cause for concern regarding the presence of WMD in Somalia.

The Lake Chad Region. In 2019, Boko Haram (BH) and ISIS-West Africa (ISIS-WA) maintained limited safe havens in parts of northeast Nigeria and on islands in Lake Chad, and they prevented the reestablishment of state administration, service delivery, and humanitarian relief in broader territory surrounding Lake Chad. These safe havens are reduced from the territory BH controlled in 2014-2015. Forces from Nigeria and other members of the Multinational Joint Task Force (Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger) lack the capability to clear these safe havens, and they lack the capacity and resources to secure borders and hold and administer liberated territory. Both BH and ISIS-WA continued to conduct asymmetric attacks against civilians, military, and government personnel, including through suicide bombers, VBIEDs, raids, ambushes, kidnappings, and other means. As a result of this insecurity, at year's end more than 2.6 million people in the Lake Chad Region remained displaced and millions more remain dependent on humanitarian assistance.

No government in the Lake Chad Region was known to support or facilitate the proliferation or trafficking of WMD in or through its territory.

The Trans-Sahara. In 2019, al-Qa'ida affiliate Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), and other groups, including Ansural Islam and ISIS in the Greater Sahara (ISIS-GS), continued to stage asymmetric attacks in the Trans-Sahara region. In addition to asymmetric attacks, these groups perpetrated a series of large-scale conventional attacks on both patrols and fixed positions of regional Armed Forces. These terrorist groups have freedom of movement in northern and central Mali, northern Burkina Faso, along the Mali-Niger border, and along both sides of the Burkina Faso/Niger border, demonstrated by their ability to quickly mass forces during the large-scale attacks seen this year. JNIM successfully inserted itself into long-standing ethnic conflicts such as the Fulani herder versus Dogon farmer conflict over grazing land and water.

The Malian government struggles to combat these terrorists, notwithstanding the presence of the UN peacekeeping mission, Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), and a French presence in the region consisting of 4,500 military members. In Burkina Faso, the government has failed to stem the tide of violence; attacks increased significantly in 2019 compared to 2018. The end of 2019 in Niger was marked by the largest casualty producing attack on the Nigerien Army to date. On December 11, the Nigerien Army lost over 70 soldiers at a remote base in the Tillaberi region near the Malian border in an attack that was claimed by ISIS-GS. There has been a significant influx of Western aid as part of the effort to increase the capacity of the G-5 Sahel Joint Force, of which Burkina Faso is a member. Niger and Chad continue to combat terrorism on their borders. Mauritania has not experienced a terrorist attack since 2011.

No government in the region was known to support or facilitate the proliferation or trafficking of WMD in or through its territory, although the region remained prone to arms and munitions smuggling.

SOUTHEAST ASIA

The Sulu/Sulawesi Seas Littoral. The Government of Indonesia conducts monitoring and surveillance of suspected terrorist cells in its territory, but acknowledges that a lack of resources hinders its ability to monitor maritime and remote parts of Indonesia, including the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas. In 2019, the Indonesian, Malaysian, and Philippines' militaries continued coordinated patrols in the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas to deter and prevent kidnapping and terrorist transit in their adjoining exclusive economic zones. The first trilateral land exercise occurred in North Kalimantan in July 2019. Indonesia's Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) hosted a bilateral counterterrorism workshop with the United States on September 4-5 to build capacity for various Indonesian agencies in preventing and countering terrorist activities in border areas and outer islands. The workshop was the first under the auspices of the 2018 U.S.-Indonesia Memorandum of Understanding on Counterterrorism.

The Government of Malaysia sustained efforts to counter terrorist use of the Sulu/Sulawesi Seas as a safe haven by working with Indonesia and the Philippines to prevent the flow of FTFs through its territory. The Royal Malaysian Police special forces unit 69 Komando, which focuses on counterterrorism, search and rescue, and counterinsurgency, participated in a crisis response training exercise in August with U.S. Indo-Pacific Command to build capacity on addressing extended hostage rescue scenarios.

The Southern Philippines. The Philippine government closely tracked terrorist groups that continue to operate in some areas, particularly in the southern Philippines. The government sustained aggressive military and law enforcement operations to deny safe haven to such groups and prevent the flow of FTFs through its territory. The government further deepened close counterterrorism cooperation with the United States, enhancing military and law enforcement efforts to address the full spectrum of terrorist threats, including from WMD. The government welcomed support from the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency in 2019 to help reduce the risk of nonstate actors acquiring or using improvised chemical weapons.

International reconstruction assistance focused on Marawi continued, but concerns remained that efforts are not including local stakeholders and adjudicating competing land claims – both factors that terrorists can exploit.

Although the Philippine government possesses the political will to apply security measures against terrorist threats and has consistently partnered with the United States and other nations to build the capacity to do so, it struggles to apply a coordinated whole-of-government approach to prevent terrorism. The continued ability of terrorist organizations to operate in the southern Philippines reflects the centuries-long challenge of governing effectively in the country's more remote areas and establishing consistent security in a region characterized by a strong separatist identity, endemic poverty, and religious differences.

THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

North Sinai. In 2019, ISIS-Sinai Province (ISIS-SP) used portions of Egypt’s Sinai region as a base to conduct attacks against military and civilian targets in the Sinai, though they claimed no attacks in mainland Egypt. Between January and December, 428 significant conflict events occurred in Northern Sinai, including 134 IED-related attacks, 153 airstrikes, and near weekly complex assaults on government fortified positions by ISIS-SP. These events have exemplified ISIS-SP’s freedom to maneuver during daytime hours and the expansion of its attacks westward, toward the Suez Canal Zone, and southward. In April, ISIS-SP responded to the call to avenge ISIS’s territorial defeat in Syria by increasing attacks globally. In addition, ISIS-SP was the first ISIS affiliate to swear allegiance to the new ISIS self-proclaimed caliph.

While Egypt’s most recent large-scale campaign against ISIS-SP, “Operation Sinai 2018,” ended, counterterrorism operations in Sinai continued. Egypt continued to partner with U.S. counterterrorism efforts in this regard and continued its measures to prevent the proliferation and trafficking of WMD. At the same time, the Government of Egypt, including the Egyptian Armed Forces, broadened its counterterrorism strategy in Sinai to encompass development and humanitarian projects on the peninsula. ISIS-SP has continued to carry out attacks, and Egyptian security forces face frequent small arms and IED attacks. These repeated attacks indicate that ISIS-SP remains intent on expanding its influence and operations in the Sinai.

The United States supported Egypt’s efforts to combat ISIS-SP and other terrorist groups in Egypt by providing AH-64 Apache helicopters, mine-resistant and ambush-protected vehicles, counter-IED training, mobile sensor towers, and border security training programs. The United States routinely engages in military-to-military discussions on how it can help Egypt defeat ISIS-SP and other terrorist groups in Egypt. The United States remains concerned about the security situation in Sinai and the potential effects on the Multinational Force and Observers peacekeeping mission located there.

Iraq. Iran-backed Kata’ib Hizballah (KH), a designated FTO, continued to maintain an active presence in Iraq targeting U.S., Coalition, and Iraqi forces. On December 27, KH launched a rocket attack on an Iraqi military base near Kirkuk, killing an American civilian contractor and wounding several U.S. military service members and Iraqi personnel. In response, on December 29, the United States carried out military strikes in Iraq and Syria targeting KH. On December 31, Iran-backed terrorists attacked the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, resulting in no casualties but damaging the embassy exterior.

Supported by the 81-member Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, the Government of Iraq maintained nominal control of the territory retaken from ISIS in 2019. ISIS remained a terrorist threat in Iraq in 2019, carrying out suicide, hit-and-run, and other asymmetric attacks throughout the country. The United States continued to engage with the Government of Iraq to deny ISIS access to CBRN materials. The United States worked to strengthen the expertise and ability of Iraq’s government, academic institutions, and private sector to secure weaponizable chemical and biological materials and to detect, disrupt, and respond effectively to suspected CBRN activity. This included providing CBRN detection, analysis, and investigation training at internationally recognized training centers of excellence, such as the Defense CBRN Center in

Vught, Netherlands, and the National Institute for Nuclear, Chemical, and Biological Protection in the Czech Republic. The United States and Iraq also continued their bilateral partnership to counter nuclear smuggling under the framework of the 2014 Joint Action Plan on Combating Nuclear and Radioactive Materials Smuggling.

Lebanon. Lebanon remained a safe haven for terrorist groups in Hizballah-controlled areas. Hizballah used these areas for terrorist training, fundraising, financing, and recruitment. The Government of Lebanon did not take actions to disarm Hizballah, which continued to maintain its weapons without the consent of the Lebanese government, contrary to UNSCR 1701. The Lebanese government did not have complete control of all regions of the country or fully control its borders with Syria and Israel. Hizballah controlled access to parts of the country and had influence over some elements within Lebanon's security services

Al-Nusrah Front, ISIS, and other Sunni terrorist groups also continued to operate in ungoverned areas along the un-demarcated Lebanese-Syrian border in 2019. The Lebanese government continued to take action to curtail these groups' activities. Other 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, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Abdullah Azzam Brigades, continued to operate with limited government control within Lebanon primarily inside Lebanon's 12 Palestinian refugee camps. These groups used the Palestinian camps as safe havens to house weapons, shelter wanted criminals, and plan terrorist attacks.

The United States worked closely with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Internal Security Forces to counter terrorist threats within Lebanon and along its border with Syria by providing counterterrorism training, military equipment, and weaponry.

Lebanon was not a source country for WMD components, but its porous border with Syria posed risks for the spread of WMDs. In 2019, the LAF and other security services partnered with U.S. government agencies to detect and prevent proliferation and trafficking of WMDs.

Libya. Conflict continued during the year between the Government of National Accord (GNA) and Libyan National Army (LNA)-aligned groups and other nonstate actors, including terrorist groups. Through most of 2019, GNA-aligned groups maintained control of most of Greater Tripoli, the Western Mountains, and the northwest coastal areas stretching from the Tunisian border to Sirte. LNA-aligned groups controlled the remainder of Libya, including Cyrenaica, and increased their presence in the central and southern districts of Jufra, Kufra, Sabha, and Murzuq. Libya's vast, sparsely populated desert areas, particularly in central and southern Libya, remain safe havens for al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant-Libya (ISIL-Libya). The GNA, although the internationally recognized government, lacked the capacity and reach to project authority into most of Libya and relied on militias and other armed groups for security in areas it does not have the ability to effectively control. The GNA had limited ability to eliminate terrorist safe havens, prevent the flow of FTFs, or ensure effective counter-proliferation efforts. U.S. airstrikes conducted in coordination with the GNA applied pressure to ISIL-Libya networks in Libya during 2019. Because of the difficulties of controlling the southern and desert borders and a lack of respect for security

procedures at air and seaports of entry by foreign state or Libyan substate groups, the GNA remained unable to effectively track flows of FTFs in and out of its territory. During the year, the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) warned that terrorist groups attempted to reach Libya following the collapse of ISIS's territorial caliphate in the Levant. On March 6, security services of Bosnia and Herzegovina released a statement indicating that Nusret Imamovic, a U.S.-designated terrorist under Executive Order 13224, had travelled to Libya in February after having fled Syria where he had fought with al-Nusra Front since 2013. Rival factions and political stakeholders outside of the GNA, including in the LNA-aligned forces, were also unable to stem the flow of FTFs.

Yemen. Iran-backed Houthi militants controlled large portions of northern Yemen, where the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) continued to maintain a presence. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) supported the Republic of Yemen Government which continued to fight to reclaim territory held by Iran-backed Houthi militants. The Republic of Yemen Government, with the support of the Saudis and Emiratis, continued counterterrorism operations to deny al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and ISIS-Yemen safe haven in the country. The northwest of the country, as well as portions of the southern coast interior, are beyond Republic of Yemen Government control, severely constraining its ability to prevent terrorist training, funding, recruitment, and transit. Although AQAP and ISIS-Yemen have been degraded in recent years, the two groups continued to benefit from the ongoing conflict with the Houthis, successfully instilling themselves among elements of the anti-Houthi coalition and exploiting the security vacuum in large parts of the country. Under President Hadi's leadership, the Republic of Yemen Government has been as cooperative with U.S., Saudi, and UAE counterterrorism operations as its limited capacity will allow. In 2019, the UAE began retrograding portions of its forces from Yemen.

Yemen's political instability continued to hinder efforts to enact or enforce comprehensive strategic trade controls to counter the flow of weapons and munitions in the region. This left Yemen vulnerable as a transit point for destabilizing weapons, including weapons emanating from Iran.

SOUTH ASIA

Afghanistan. Terrorist and insurgent groups exploit Afghanistan's ungoverned spaces, including the border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Islamic State's Khorasan Province (ISIS-K), elements of al-Qa'ida, including affiliate al-Qa'ida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), and terrorist groups targeting Pakistan, such as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, continued to use the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region as a safe haven. Despite progress against ISIS-K in late 2019, the Government of National Unity (GNU) struggled to assert control over this remote terrain, where the population is largely detached from national institutions. U.S. and Afghan security forces partnered in numerous counterterrorism operations against ISIS-K and AQIS, including an operation in September, which eliminated AQIS leader Asim Umar in Helmand province.

The potential for WMD trafficking and proliferation remained a concern. In 2019, the United States and Afghanistan continued to work to finalize a bilateral framework to help

Afghanistan enhance its capabilities to prevent, detect, and respond to nuclear and other radioactive material smuggling incidents. The Afghanistan and U.S. governments also continued to work to implement comprehensive strategic trade controls and strengthen Afghanistan's border security.

Pakistan. Although Pakistan's National Action Plan calls to "ensure that no armed militias are allowed to function in the country," several terrorist groups that focus on attacks outside the country continued to operate from Pakistani soil in 2019, including the Haqqani Network, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, and Jaish-e-Mohammed. The government and military acted inconsistently with respect to terrorist safe havens throughout the country. Authorities did not take sufficient action to stop certain terrorist groups and individuals from openly operating in the country.

Pakistan is committed to combating the trafficking of items that could contribute to the development of WMDs and their delivery systems. Pakistan was a constructive and active participant in International Atomic Energy Agency-hosted meetings and in the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism (GICNT).

WESTERN HEMISPHERE

Colombia. Rough terrain and dense forest cover, coupled with low population densities and historically weak government presence, define Colombia's borders with Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela. Historically these conditions have allowed terrorist groups to operate, particularly Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dissidents and the National Liberation Army (ELN). The peace accord between the Government of Colombia and FARC in 2016 led to a normalization of relations, with the latter entering the political sphere. However, ongoing challenges to peace accord implementation and continued security vacuums have created risk for terrorist activity and attacks on civilians, security forces, and infrastructure in some areas in 2019. A troubling number of FARC dissidents, estimated at around 2,600 individuals who chose not to participate in the peace process or have since abandoned the peace process, continued engaging in terrorist and other criminal activities, particularly in border regions and areas previously controlled by the FARC.

The ELN perpetrated armed attacks across the country in 2019. In January, the ELN detonated a car bomb inside Colombia's national police academy, killing 22 cadets and injuring 87 others. President Duque suspended peace talks with the ELN after assuming office in August 2018, then ended them after the January 2019 attack.

Improved relations with neighboring Ecuador have led to some increased cooperation on law enforcement issues. Colombia also continued to cooperate and share information with the Panamanian National Border Service. Additionally, the Government of Colombia cooperated with Brazil to address potentially problematic areas along their shared borders, while Brazil continued efforts to implement its Integrated Border Monitoring System to monitor its entire border.

Cuba. Cuba, citing peace negotiation protocols, refused Colombia's request to extradite ten ELN leaders living in Havana after that group claimed responsibility for the January 2019 bombing of the national police academy in Bogota, killing 22 people and injuring 87. On October 11, Colombia filed extradition requests for ELN leaders Victor Orlando Cubides aka "Pablo Tejada" and Isreal Ramirez Pineda aka "Pablo Beltran" with the Cuban government, which has pointedly not responded. In addition to ELN terrorists, there was credible reporting that FARC dissidents who abandoned the peace process in Colombia traveled to Havana to seek the regime's support.

Cuba also harbors several U.S. fugitives from justice wanted on charges of political violence, many of whom have resided in Cuba for decades. For example, the Cuban regime has refused to return Joanne Chesimard, aka Assata Shakur, a fugitive on the FBI's Most Wanted Terrorists List, who was convicted of executing New Jersey State Trooper Werner Foerster. Cuba also has refused to return William "Guillermo" Morales, a fugitive bomb maker for the Armed Forces for National Liberation (FALN), who is wanted by the FBI and escaped detention after being convicted of charges related to domestic terrorism; Ishmael LaBeet, aka Ishmael Muslim Ali, who received eight life sentences after being convicted of killing eight people in the U.S. Virgin Islands in 1972 and hijacking a plane to flee to Cuba in 1984; Charles Lee Hill, who has been charged with killing New Mexico State Policeman Robert Rosenbloom in 1971; and Ambrose Henry Montfort, who used a bomb threat to hijack a passenger aircraft and fly to Cuba in 1983. Cuba is also believed to host or have hosted U.S. fugitive terrorists Catherine Marie Kerkow and Elizabeth Anna Duke. The Cuban government provides housing, food ration books, and medical care for all of the fugitives residing there.

Venezuela. The regime allows and tolerates the use of its territory by terrorist organizations. Much of Venezuela is ungoverned, under-governed, or ill-governed. At times, the regime has openly welcomed terrorist activities in its territory. On July 28, during the closing remarks of the Sao Paulo Forum in Caracas, Maduro stated that Iván Márquez and Jesús Santrich (former FARC leaders who were at that time missing and widely presumed to have left the peace process and returned to terrorist activities) were both welcome in Venezuela. On August 29, both Márquez and Santrich appeared in a video in which they were wearing uniforms, carrying weapons, and calling for the FARC to return to arms against the Colombian government. The democratically elected National Assembly criticized the regime's provision of territory, Venezuelan national identification, and passports for members of the terrorist organization. Venezuela is also a permissive environment for the ELN and Hizballah sympathizers.

COUNTERING TERRORISM ON THE ECONOMIC FRONT

In 2019, the Department of State designated one new FTO and amended two existing FTO designations by adding aliases (changing the primary name of one of the groups in the process). In addition, the Department designated 19 organizations and individuals as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs) under Executive Order (E.O.) 13224, as amended. The Department also reviewed and maintained the FTO designation of nine entities (treating a pre-existing alias of one of the groups as that group's primary name going forward).