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# Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: United Arab Emirates

BUREAU OF COUNTERTERRORISM

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### United Arab Emirates

**Overview:** The United Arab Emirates government continued to prosecute multiple individuals for terrorism-related offenses in 2019. In line with previous years, the UAE continued its collaboration with U.S. law enforcement on counterterrorism cases; its membership in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS; and its support for CVE and related platforms, such as the Sawab and Hedayah Centers, respectively. The UAE remained co-chair of the Defeat-ISIS Coalition's Communications Working Group, along with the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as co-chair of the Defeat-ISIS Coalition's Stabilization Working Group with the United States and Germany.

The government's security apparatus continued monitoring suspected terrorists in the UAE and foiled potential terrorist attacks within its borders. The UAE customs, police, and other security agencies improved border security and worked with financial authorities to counter terrorist finance. UAE government officials worked closely with U.S. law enforcement counterparts to increase the UAE's CT capabilities. The UAE continued to support counterterrorism efforts in Yemen to counter AQAP and ISIS, including support to local forces in CT operations. The drawdown of some UAE forces in Yemen and disbanding of some local security forces supported by the UAE following conflict between the Republic of Yemen Government and forces aligned with the Southern Transitional Council contributed to a reversal of territorial gains in the fight against AQAP and ISIS in Yemen, including in areas known to be historical safe havens for the groups.

**2019 Terrorist Incidents:** There were no terrorist attacks reported in the UAE in 2019.

**Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security:** In 2019, the UAE continued to prosecute numerous individuals in terrorism-related cases using existing legislation. International human rights NGOs and activists reported the UAE uses its CT and cyber-crime laws as cover to pursue cases against political dissidents and activists.

The State Security Directorate (SSD) in Abu Dhabi and Dubai State Security (DSS) remained primarily responsible for CT law enforcement efforts. Local, emirate-level police forces, especially Abu Dhabi Police and Dubai Police, are the first responders in such cases and often provided technical assistance to SSD and DSS, respectively. Overall, the UAE security apparatus demonstrated capability in investigations, crisis response, and border security, and forces were trained and equipped to detect, deter, and respond to terrorist incidents.

According to press reports, the Federal Appeal Court's State Security Court examined new terrorism-related cases in 2019 and retried terrorism-related cases from 2018. Most cases involved defendants accused of promoting or affiliating with UAE-designated terrorist organizations, including ISIS, AQAP, and al-Nusrah Front.

As in previous years, the Government of the UAE worked closely with the United States, through DHS, to improve its border security posture. Law enforcement information sharing between Abu Dhabi Police's Criminal Investigations Division and DHS Homeland Security Investigations helped counter transnational criminal organizations and terrorist groups. UAE ports of entry used an internal name-based watchlist system populated by local immigration, deportation, corrections, and security agencies to identify individuals who were prohibited from entering the country or were sought by UAE authorities. Some human rights organizations claimed that activists, academics, and journalists who had written critically about UAE policy were included on such lists and barred from entry. INTERPOL and GCC watchlists were incorporated into the UAE's internal watchlist.

**Countering the Financing of Terrorism:** The UAE is a member of MENAFATF. Its FIU, known as the Anti-Money Laundering and Suspicious Cases Unit (AMLSCU), is a member of the Egmont Group. The UAE is also a member of the Defeat ISIS Coalition's CIFG and the TFTC.

In collaboration with other TFTC member states, the UAE in 2019 imposed one round of sanctions against individuals and entities affiliated with the Iranian regime's terror-support networks in the region.

The UAE passed Cabinet Decision No. 10 of 2019, also known as the Implementing Regulation of Decree Federal Law No. 20 of 2018, on Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism and Illegal Organizations and provided interpretive guidance to financial institutions on these regulatory changes.

The Central Bank of the UAE (CBUAE) announced a new initiative to supervise financial institution sanctions screening capabilities. Starting in the first quarter of 2020, CBUAE will use its own sanctions

screening software as a baseline to test the sanctions screening capabilities of all UAE financial institutions regulated under the authority of the CBUAE.

In partnership with UNODC, the AMLSCU launched an online platform called goAML to facilitate the receipt, analysis, and dissemination of suspicious transactions and activity reports related to money laundering and the financing of terrorism, to UAE law enforcement authorities.

**Countering Violent Extremism:** The UAE government continued to play a leadership role in global CVE efforts. The UAE continued its support of Hedayah, the International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism, and the Sawab Center, a collaborative partnership with the United States to amplify credible voices to counter terrorist messaging online. The government separately worked to amplify credible alternative narratives by supporting the fifth annual Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, which gathered 800 scholars and religious figures from 120 countries. Prominent UAE officials and religious leaders continued to publicly criticize and highlight the dangers of terrorist narratives. Through the General Authority of Islamic Affairs and Endowments, the government regulated all mosque sermons and religious publications to “instill the principle of moderation in Islam.” The UAE continued efforts to provide “moderate” religious education training to educators and imams from Afghanistan.

The UAE declared 2019 the “Year of Tolerance” and organized public events at home and abroad to promote the values of tolerance, coexistence, and cooperation among peoples from all races and religions. The UAE cabinet approved a national initiative to promote the role of the government as an incubator for tolerance, and the Emirate of Dubai hosted the World Tolerance Summit. The UAE announced the construction of an “Abrahamic Family House” to promote interfaith harmony and commemorate the historic visit of Pope Francis to Abu Dhabi in February 2019.

**International and Regional Cooperation:** The UAE has signed CT cooperation agreements with Egypt, New Zealand, Russia, India, Germany, South Korea, and Brazil. The UAE government participated in several international conferences on combating terrorism, expressing the UAE’s strategy and efforts in combating terrorism. The UAE hosted the annual Defeat-ISIS Coalition meeting in Abu Dhabi in October and an Arab League panel discussion on the role of media in combating terrorism in November. It also continued to play a role in countering AQAP and ISIS-Yemen through the deployment of forces in south Yemen.

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