**Country Reports on Terrorism 2017: State Sponsors of Terrorism**

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BUREAU OF COUNTERTERRORISM AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Country Reports on Terrorism 2017

Report

This report provides a snapshot of events during 2017 relevant to countries designated as State Sponsors of Terrorism. It does not constitute a new announcement regarding such designations.

To designate a country as a State Sponsor of Terrorism, the Secretary of State must determine that the government of such country has repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism. Once a country is designated, it remains a State Sponsor of Terrorism until the designation is rescinded in accordance with statutory criteria. A wide range of sanctions is imposed as a result of a State Sponsor of Terrorism designation, including:

A ban on arms-related exports and sales;

Controls over exports of dual-use items, requiring 30-day Congressional notification for goods or services that could significantly enhance the terrorist-list country’s military capability or ability to support terrorism;

Prohibitions on economic assistance; and

Imposition of miscellaneous financial and other restrictions.

**DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF KOREA**

On November 20, 2017, the Secretary of State designated the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) as a State Sponsor of Terrorism. The Secretary determined that the Government of the DPRK has repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism, as the DPRK has been implicated in assassinations on foreign soil. These terrorist acts are in keeping with the DPRK’s wider range of dangerous and malicious behavior, including continued nuclear and ballistic missile testing and development as well as Kim Jong Un’s threats against American cities and territories and those of our allies.

The DPRK was previously designated as a state sponsor of terrorism in 1988 primarily on the basis of its involvement in the bombing of a Korean Airlines passenger flight in 1987. The DPRK’s designation was rescinded in 2008 after a thorough review found that the DPRK met the statutory requirements for rescission. In 2017, the Secretary of State determined that the DPRK has repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism since the DPRK’s state sponsor of terrorism designation was rescinded in 2008.

In addition to the DPRK’s support for acts of international terrorism that led to its 2017 designation, the DPRK has continued to violate UN Security Council resolutions and has historically provided support for acts of international terrorism. Four Japanese Red Army members wanted by the Japanese government for participating in a 1970 Japan Airlines hijacking continued to shelter in the DPRK. The Japanese government also continued to seek a full accounting of the fate of the 12 Japanese nationals believed to have been abducted by DPRK state entities in the 1970s and 1980s; only five such abductees have been repatriated to Japan since 2002.

**IRAN**

Designated as a State Sponsor of Terrorism in 1984, Iran continued its terrorist-related activity in 2017, including support for Lebanese Hizballah (LH), Palestinian terrorist groups in Gaza, and various groups in Syria, Iraq, and throughout the Middle East. Iran used the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF) to provide support to terrorist organizations, provide cover for associated covert operations, and create instability in the Middle East. Iran has acknowledged the involvement of the IRGC-QF in both of the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, and the IRGC-QF is Iran’s primary mechanism for cultivating and supporting terrorists abroad. Iran uses regional proxy forces to provide sufficient deniability to shield it from the consequences of its aggressive policies.

In 2017, Iran supported various Iraqi Shia terrorist groups, including Kata’ib Hizballah. It also bolstered the Assad regime in Syria. Iran views the Assad regime in Syria as a crucial ally and Syria and Iraq as crucial routes to supply weapons to LH, Iran’s primary terrorist group ally. Through financial or residency enticements, Iran has facilitated and coerced primarily Shia fighters from Afghanistan and Pakistan to participate in the Assad regime’s brutal crackdown in Syria. Iranian-supported Shia militias in Iraq have also committed serious human rights abuses against primarily Sunni civilians. Iranian forces have directly backed militia operations in Syria with armored vehicles, artillery, and drones.

Since the end of the 2006 Israeli-Lebanese Hizballah conflict, Iran has supplied LH with thousands of rockets, missiles, and small arms, in direct violation of UNSCR 1701. Iran has also provided hundreds of millions of dollars in support of LH and has trained thousands of its fighters at camps in Iran. Lebanese Hizballah fighters have been used extensively in Syria to support the Assad regime. In Bahrain, Iran has continued to provide weapons, support, and training to local Shia militant groups. In March 2017, the Department of State designated two individuals affiliated with the Bahrain-based al-Ashtar Brigades (AAB), which receives funding and support from the Government of Iran, as Specially Designated Global Terrorists under Executive Order 13224.

Iran continued to provide weapons, training, and funding to Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist groups, including Palestine Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command. These Palestinian terrorist groups have been behind a number of deadly attacks originating in Gaza and the West Bank, including attacks against Israeli civilians and Egyptian security forces in the Sinai Peninsula.

The Iranian government maintains a robust offensive cyber program and has sponsored cyberattacks against foreign government and private sector entities.

Iran remained unwilling to bring to justice senior al-Qa’ida (AQ) members residing in Iran and has refused to publicly identify the members in its custody. Iran has allowed AQ facilitators to operate a core facilitation pipeline through Iran since at least 2009, enabling AQ to move funds and fighters to South Asia and Syria.

**SUDAN**

Sudan was designated as a State Sponsor of Terrorism in 1993 for its support to international terrorist groups, including the Abu Nidal Organization, Palestine Islamic Jihad, Hamas, and Lebanese Hizballah. Sudan does, however, work with the United States on counterterrorism, despite its designation as a State Sponsor of Terrorism. The Government of Sudan continued to pursue counterterrorism operations alongside regional partners, including operations to counter threats to U.S. interests and personnel in Sudan. Sudan’s “de-radicalization” program focused on reintegration and rehabilitation of returned foreign terrorist fighters and those espousing terrorist ideologies.

In June 2010, four Sudanese men sentenced to death for the January 1, 2008 killing of two U.S. Embassy staff members escaped from Khartoum’s maximum security prison. That same month, Sudanese authorities recaptured one of the escaped convicts; the individual remains in custody serving a life sentence. Two of the escaped convicts were killed in 2011 and 2015 while fighting for terrorist organizations outside of Sudan. In November 2017, the final escaped convict was killed in Somalia during an air strike against an ISIS affiliated terrorist group.

In February 2017, an unidentified group of individuals likely prematurely detonated a bomb in an apartment in the Arkawit neighborhood of Khartoum, causing an explosion. Sudanese officials reported that they had arrested several foreign nationals and seized explosive material, weapons, and foreign passports after a post-blast raid of the apartment. No other terrorist attacks were reported in 2017.

On October 6, 2017, the United States lifted certain economic sanctions on Sudan due to progress the government made through the Five Track Engagement Plan, which includes a process to evaluate Sudan’s counterterrorism cooperation with the United States. The Plan calls on Sudan to improve its counterterrorism efforts through enhanced interagency and international cooperation. As part of the government’s counterterrorism strategy, Sudanese forces patrol the Sudanese-Libyan border to interdict the flow of suspected terrorists transiting through the region, and to prevent arms smuggling and other illicit activities. Sudan’s expansive size, and the government’s outdated technology and limited visa restrictions, presented challenges for border security.

**SYRIA**

Designated in 1979 as a State Sponsor of Terrorism, Syria continued its political and military support to a variety of terrorist groups. The regime continued to provide weapons and political support to Lebanese Hizballah (LH) and continued to allow Iran to rearm the terrorist organization. The Assad regime’s relationship with LH and Iran grew stronger in 2017 as the regime became more reliant on external actors to fight regime opponents. President Bashar al-Assad remained a staunch defender of Iran’s policies, while Iran exhibited equally energetic support for the Syrian regime. Syrian government speeches and press releases often included statements supporting terrorist groups, particularly LH.

Over the past decade, the Assad regime’s permissive attitude towards al-Qa’ida and other terrorist groups’ foreign terrorist fighter facilitation efforts during the Iraq conflict in turn fed the growth of al-Qa’ida, ISIS, and affiliated terrorist networks inside Syria. The Syrian government’s awareness and encouragement for many years of terrorists’ transit through Syria to enter Iraq for the purpose of fighting Coalition Forces is well documented. Those very networks were among the terrorist elements that brutalized the Syrian and Iraqi populations in 2017. Additionally, Shia militia groups, some of which are U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations aligned with Iran, continued to travel to Syria to fight on behalf of the Assad regime.

As part of a broader strategy during the year, the regime portrayed Syria itself as a victim of terrorism, characterizing all of the internal armed opposition as “terrorists.” From Syria, ISIS plotted or inspired external terrorist operations. Additionally, the Syrian regime has purchased oil from ISIS through various intermediaries, adding to the terrorist group’s revenue.

Syria is not in compliance with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). The United States assesses that Syria has used chemical weapons repeatedly against the Syrian people every year since acceding to the Convention in 2013, and is therefore in violation of its obligations of the CWC. There have been numerous reports of chemical weapons use by the regime during the current conflict. On April 4, 2017, the Syrian regime attacked the town of Khan Shaykhun with sarin killing up to 100 people. The Joint Investigative Mechanism of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the United Nations has attributed four chemical weapons attacks in 2014, 2015, and 2017 to the Syrian government.