

Angola: Extremism and Terrorism

In March 2017, Kassim Tajideen, a prominent Hezbollah financier, was arrested on an INTERPOL warrant and extradited to the United States on charges of fraud, money laundering, and violating global terrorism sanctions regulations. Tajideen, a U.S.-designated terrorist, had been living in Angola since 1990, where he operated a business empire that he used to contribute tens of millions of dollars to Hezbollah. (Sources: [IDEX](#), [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#), [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#), [U.S. Department of Justice](#), [Washington Post](#))

Overview

Angola has enjoyed relative peace and stability since 2002, after decades of conflict. Angola gained independence from Portugal in 1975 after a protracted guerrilla struggle for independence that began in the 1950s. Nonetheless, the two rival independence movements, the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) subsequently began to compete for power, launching a 27-year-long civil war that did not end until 2002. The MPLA and UNITA have since functioned as political parties, though the MPLA has dominated the country's politics. MPLA member Joao Lourenco became Angola's president in 2017 following the 38-year presidency of MPLA member Jose Eduardo dos Santos. (Sources: [BBC News](#), [BBC News](#))

The main threat of terrorism in Angola stems from a separatist movement in the oil-rich northern province of Cabinda. According to the U.S. Department of State's Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), the Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC) is the only active group that has carried out terrorist attacks in the country. FLEC has waged a low-level guerrilla movement since the decade before Angolan independence, and has fractured and regrouped several times. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the group launched attacks on several military and foreign targets within Angola. Its most high-profile attack to date was a January 2010 attack on a bus carrying the Togolese national soccer team, which killed three and wounded nine. Though FLEC has since offered to negotiate with the Angolan government, the government has rejected such offers, and the group has continued to launch small-scale attacks against military targets in Cabinda in recent years. (Sources: [OSAC](#), [BTI Project](#))

There is little threat from Islamic extremism in Angola, as there are few Muslims in the country. Approximately 90 percent of the country's population is Christian. The Angolan government does not officially recognize Islam, and was even accused by international media of "banning Islam" in 2013 after authorities destroyed two mosques in the capital, Luanda, though they were only destroyed because they had been built without permits. According to the BTI Project, much of Angola's public and state media portrays Islam as "un-Angolan," foreign, and dangerous, and equates it with the threat of terrorism. However, there have been no reports of Islamic-inspired extremist activity in Angola to date apart from two U.S.-designated Hezbollah financiers who have operated or sought refuge in the country. One of them operated a business network in Angola for at least two decades after 1990, and another had reportedly found employment in the country as of 2017. Angola has so far remained free of extremist activity from regional Islamist threats such as Boko Haram, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and al-Shabab. (Sources: [OSAC](#), [BBC News](#), [BTI Project](#), [IDEX](#), [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#), [U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee](#))

Although the terrorist threat in Angola has so far been low, the country has adopted some legal and administrative measures to combat terrorism domestically, including a National Anti-Terrorism Observatory and anti-money-laundering/counter-terrorist financing (AML/CTF) legislation that is in accordance with United Nations-backed international regulations. Angola also cooperates with several multilateral international organizations to exchange information in the aim of preventing and fighting terrorism, both at the regional and global level. (Sources: [United Nations](#), [Library of Congress](#), [Angola Press News Agency](#))

According to a 2002 public opinion poll conducted by the Pew Research Center, 59 percent of Angolans favored U.S.-led efforts to fight terrorism. According to the BTI Project, many Angolans reportedly perceive Islam as a threat, largely due to the influence of discourse generated by the media and some political leaders, who portray Islam as invasive and dangerous. However, most Angolans reportedly also place a high value on democratic values and on the country's overall peace and stability, especially given Angola's violent past. (Sources: [Pew Research Center](#), [BTI Project](#))

Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

Islamic extremism poses a low threat in Angola, as there are few Muslims in the country. As a former Portuguese colony, Angola is a majority Christian country, with about 90 percent of the population adhering to the religion. However, there has been a growing presence of Muslims in the country in recent years. Since the end of the civil war in 2002, an increasing number of Muslim individuals from West Africa and Somalia have immigrated to Angola in search of economic opportunities. A number of mosques and Islamic schools have been established, and a small number of

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Angolans have reportedly even converted to Islam. (Source: [BTI Project](#))

The Angolan government does not officially recognize Islam as an established religion, and was even accused by international media of “banning Islam” in 2013 after authorities destroyed two mosques in the capital, Luanda. However, authorities later clarified that they were only destroyed because they had been built without permits. Nonetheless, according to the BTI Project, much of Angola’s public and state media portrays Islam as “un-Angolan,” foreign, and dangerous. The Secretary General of the Council of Christian Churches (CICA) called Islam “one of the greatest challenges churches are facing at the moment,” and Angola’s Minister of Culture stated that she was “preoccupied” by the religion’s expansion. Islam is regularly equated with illegal immigration and the threat of terrorism, though there have not been any Islamic-inspired terror attacks in the country to date or reports of Angolans joining Islamic extremist movements abroad. Angola has so far remained free of extremist activity from regional Islamist threats such as Boko Haram, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and al-Shabab. The biggest threat of terrorism in Angola instead stems from a separatist movement in the oil-rich northern province of Cabinda. (Sources: [BTI Project](#), [BBC News](#), [OSAC](#))

Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda

OSAC lists the Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (Frente para a Libertação do Enclave de Cabinda, FLEC) as the only active group that has carried out terrorist attacks in the country. FLEC seeks the independence and sovereignty of the resource-rich northern province of Cabinda, which is responsible for almost half of all of the country’s oil production. FLEC claims that the province is historically and culturally different from the rest of the country, and that the province’s own population does not benefit from its resources. The organization has carried out a low-level guerrilla movement since the 1960s, first against Portugal and then against the Angolan state. When Portugal granted Angola independence in 1975, FLEC proclaimed Cabinda’s independence from Angola and established its own provisional government for the province. However, Angolan troops were able to reclaim control of Cabinda, and FLEC fractured into several factions. (Sources: [OSAC](#), [BTI Project](#))

FLEC reformed and gained traction in the 1990s, launching attacks on at least 15 military targets in Cabinda during the summer of 1997, and in 1999 began to kidnap foreign construction and oil workers in the aim of attracting international attention. The group fractured and regrouped multiple times in the subsequent years, and has continued to launch attacks on similar targets. Though a peace agreement was signed by FLEC and the Angolan government in 2006, it only spurred opposing FLEC factions to splinter away and continue fighting. FLEC’s low-level insurgency has been the only conflict in Angola since the end of the country’s civil war in 2002. (Sources: [BTI Project](#), [Washington Post](#), [Al Jazeera](#))

In its most high-profile attack to date, FLEC gunmen attacked a bus carrying the Togolese national soccer team to the African Cup of Nations tournament hosted in Angola in January 2010, killing three individuals and wounding nine others. The attack drew a great deal of international attention, and FLEC leader Rodrigues Mingas later apologized for attacking the Togolese players, stating that the intended target had been the Angolan security forces guarding the team. Though FLEC has since offered to negotiate with the Angolan government, the government has rejected the group’s offers and instead pursued a strategy of military suppression. Nonetheless, FLEC retains some popular support and has continued to claim small-scale attacks against military targets in Cabinda in recent years, though the Angolan government frequently denies any ongoing conflict. (Sources: [OSAC](#), [BTI Project](#), [Guardian](#), [Guardian](#), [Novo Jornal](#))

Hezbollah

Angola hosted a prominent Hezbollah financier in the country for more than two decades. In 1990, Lebanese citizen Kassim Tajideen moved to Angola, where he started a trading company. In May 2009, Tajideen was designated as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist by the United States for operating a business network in Africa that he used to contribute tens of millions of dollars to Hezbollah. The network included three of Tajideen’s businesses in Angola—Golfrate Holdings Lda, Afri Belg Comercio E Industria Lda, and Grupo Arosfran Empreendimentos E Participacoes Sarl—all of which the United States designated as terrorist entities in December 2010. The United States charged Tajideen with fraud, money laundering, and violating global terrorism sanctions regulations and arrested him in Casablanca on an INTERPOL warrant in March 2017. He was extradited to the United States, where he pled not guilty. Legal documents show that U.S. companies sent shipments to Tajideen’s companies in Angola throughout 2013, 2014, and 2015. (Sources: [IDEX](#), [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#), [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#), [U.S. Department of Justice](#), [Washington Post](#))

According to the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee, Hatem Barakat, who was designated as a Hezbollah financier by the United States in 2006, had the Infornet Princessa store in Luanda, Angola, listed as his place of employment on Facebook as of November 2017. The store, which sells electronics, children’s toys, and accessories, was still listed on Barakat’s Facebook profile as of March 2018. (Sources: [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#), [U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee](#), [Facebook](#), [Facebook](#))

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Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

- **November 12, 2017:** Five Angolan soldiers and three FLEC militants are killed in clashes near Buco Zau.
Source: [Angola 24 Horas](#)
- According to the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee, U.S.-designated Hezbollah financier Hatem Barakat has his present place of employment listed on Facebook the Infornet Princesa store in Luanda, Angola, as of this date.
It is still listed on Barakat's Facebook profile as of March 2018. Sources: [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#), [U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee](#), [Facebook](#), [Facebook](#)
- **April 7, 2017:** FLEC claims responsibility for an attack on an Angolan military vehicle that killed six soldiers and another attack on a military patrol in the village of Chimbanza that killed four.
Source: [Porto Canal](#)
- FLEC claims that it killed 18 Angolan soldiers in clashes with the Angolan Armed Forces between February 3 and February 10.
Sources: [RFI Portuguese](#), [Porto Canal](#)
- **January 23, 2017:** FLEC claims that it killed two soldiers and wounded four others in an attack in the Chibango area of Cabinda.
Source: [Novo Jornal](#)
- **December 6, 2016:** FLEC engages in clashes with the Angolan Armed Forces in the village of Mbongozi-Muno, killing six soldiers.
Source: [RFI Portuguese](#)
- - : FLEC claims that it killed more than 50 Angolan soldiers in attacks throughout August and September.
Source: [Rede Angola](#)
- Five FLEC militants board an offshore Chevron gas platform and threaten foreign petroleum workers.
Source: [Reuters](#)
- FLEC claims that it killed a total of 30 Angolan soldiers in two attacks in Cabinda that took place on March 13 and March 16.
Source: [Daily Mail](#)
- **October 1, 2015:** In a speech addressing the United Nations, Angolan vice president Manual Domingos Vicente advocates for a global coalition to combat terrorist activity in Africa.
Source: [AllAfrica](#)
- FLEC militants ambush an army patrol in an attack that kills one soldier.
Source: [OSAC](#)
- **February 10, 2014:** Angola's National Assembly passes a law criminalizing terror financing in accordance with United Nations-backed international regulations.
Source: [Library of Congress](#)
- **August 1, 2012:** The World Bank and the Eastern and Southern Africa Anti-Money Laundering Group (ESAAMLG) assess that Angola's anti money-laundering/counter-terrorist financing legislation, passed in 2011, needs better implementation procedures and does not sufficiently comply with international standards.
Sources: [FATF](#), [ESAAMLG](#)
- **December 9, 2010:** The U.S. Department of the Treasury designates three of Kassim Tajideen's businesses in Angola as terrorist entities. The businesses are Golfrate Holdings Lda, Afri Belg Comercio E Industria Lda, and Grupo Arosfran Empreendimentos E Participacoes Sarl.
Source: [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#)
- **January 7, 2010:** FLEC gunmen attack a bus carrying the Togolese national soccer team to the African Cup of Nations tournament, killing three individuals and wounding nine others.
FLEC leader Rodrigues Mingas later apologizes for attacking the Togolese players, stating that the intended target had been the Angolan security forces guarding the team. Sources: [OSAC](#), [Guardian](#), [Guardian](#)
- **May 27, 1999:** The U.S. Department of the Treasury designates Kassim Tajideen as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist.
Source: [U.S. Department of the Treasury](#)
- FLEC begins to target and kidnap foreigners, including several construction and oil workers, in the aim of attracting international attention.
Source: [Al Jazeera](#)
- - : The Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC) launches at least 15 attacks on military targets in Cabinda.
Source: [Al Jazeera](#)
- Kassim Tajideen moves to Angola, where he starts a trading company.
Source: [IDEX](#)

Domestic Counter-Extremism

According to OSAC, the Angolan government takes the threat of terrorism in the country seriously. However, that threat is low, as regional terrorist

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threats such as Boko Haram, AQIM, and al-Shabab have not carried out any attacks in Angola to date. Angola has reaffirmed its commitment to fighting against terrorism as recently as January 2018, when Angolan president Joao Lourenco stated in an interview that Angola is working to prevent the country from being affected by international terrorism (Sources: [OSAC](#), [Xinhua](#))

In July 2015, in a speech to the Counter-Terrorism Committee of the U.N. Security Council, Angolan foreign minister Georges Chikoti stated that the Angolan government has adopted several legal and administrative measures to combat terrorism. For example, within its Ministry of the Interior, Angola has a National Anti-Terrorism Observatory, which consists of a group of multi-sectoral experts tasked with monitoring any potential terrorist threat. Angola also has legislation outlawing any form of collaboration with a terrorist group. (Sources: [Angola Press News Agency](#), [United Nations](#))

Angola has some anti-money-laundering/counter-terrorist financing (AML/CTF) initiatives in place. Angola is a member of the Eastern and Southern Africa Anti-Money Laundering Group (ESAAMLG), an associate member of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). A 2012 evaluation of Angola's AML/CTF framework by World Bank and the ESAAMLG assessed that Angola's AML/CTF legislation, passed in 2011, needed better implementation procedures and did not sufficiently comply with international standards. On February 10, 2014, Angola's National Assembly passed a new law criminalizing terror financing in accordance with United Nations-backed international regulations, including the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism. Angola also created a Financial Intelligence Unit within its National Bank to centralize and expedite AML/CTF information processing. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#), [FATF](#), [ESAAMLG](#), [Library of Congress](#), [United Nations](#))

International Counter-Extremism

According to statements made by Angolan officials, Angola cooperates with several multilateral international organizations to exchange information in the aim of preventing and fighting terrorism. These include regional organizations such as the South African Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Algeria-based African Centre for Studies and Research on Terrorism (CAERT), and the African Security and Intelligence Committee (CISSA), which is part of the African Union. In February 2015, the Angolan Ministry of Justice and Human Rights sponsored a regional seminar on terrorism in Central Africa in partnership with the United Nations. That October, in a speech addressing the United Nations, then-Angolan vice president Manuel Domingos Vicente advocated for a global coalition to combat terrorist activity in Africa. (Sources: [United Nations](#), [Angola Press News Agency](#), [Angola Press News Agency](#))

Beyond the regional level, Angola cooperates with the States of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP), INTERPOL, and the United Nations in the same aim of preventing international terrorism. OSAC reports that the Angolan government works with the U.S. Embassy to collect and disseminate information about any possible terrorist threats. (Sources: [United Nations](#), [Angola Press News Agency](#), [OSAC](#))

Public Opinion

According to a 2002 public opinion poll conducted by the Pew Research Center, 59 percent of Angolans favored U.S.-led efforts to fight terrorism. OSAC reports that some anti-American and anti-Western sentiment exists in Angola, but is rarely expressed publicly. (Sources: [Pew Research Center](#), [OSAC](#))

According to a 2016 report by the BTI Project, Islam is perceived as a threat in Christian-majority Angola, largely due to the influence of discourse generated by state and public media and some political and civic leaders, who portray Islam as "un-Angolan," invasive, and dangerous. Islam is regularly equated with foreignness, illegal immigration, and the threat of terrorism, despite the fact that there have been no Islamic-inspired terror attacks in Angola to date. (Source: [BTI Project](#))

The BTI Project also reports that there are no reliable public opinion surveys available for Angola, but in general, there is a high level of acceptance for democratic values and procedures. Although there has been some opposition to the government since the end of the country's 27-year-long civil war in 2002, most Angolans place a higher value on the country's nascent peace and stability and reject any prospect of violence. (Source: [BTI Project](#))