



EURASIA SECURITY WATCH

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Related Categories: Afghanistan; Iraq; Turkey

U.S. ENDS SUPPORT TO RIVAL SHIA GROUPS IN LEBANON

The U.S. ended its financial support for Haaya Bina, a civil society program in Lebanon that aims to develop moderate Shiite political voices to counter those of Hezbollah. The organization has stated that the Obama administration has done so to avoid confronting Iran, with which the administration is hoping to conclude a nuclear accord. State Department officials deny Haaya Bina's accusation, saying that the program had not been successful in meeting its goals and that the U.S. still funds other Haaya Bina initiatives. However, not everyone seems appeased. According to Firas Maksad, director of Global Policy Advisors, a consulting group focused on the Middle East, "At best, the decision shows poor political judgment...Coming on the heels of an expected deal with Iran, it is bound to generate much speculation about possible ulterior motives." (Wall Street Journal June 9, 2015)

OPPOSITION WANTS ERDOGAN OUT OF COALITION TALKS

Following Turkey's elections earlier this month that saw the end of majority rule for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AK Party), the country's opposition parties (who collectively won a majority of the vote) are in negotiations to form a coalition government. Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the leader of center-left Republican People's Party (CHP), Turkey's main opposition party, has said "it was 'unacceptable' for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to act as the primary political actor in the coalition talks, demanding that he stay within the boundaries determined by the constitution." Kilicdaroglu added, "Pulling the presidency into the constitutional boundaries is one of our main principles. More, it is unacceptable for him to appear as a primary actor at a time where coalition talks are going on." (Al Jazeera June 15, 2015)

AL QAEDA THE "LESSER EVIL" IN SYRIA?

Among some of America's regional allies and some Western officials, there is an increasingly prevalent view that Nusra Front, al Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, should be seen as the "lesser evil to be wooed rather than bombed." Advocates of the approach argue that, "as the Assad regime wobbles and Islamic State, or ISIS, gains ground in both Syria and Iraq, reaching out to the more pragmatic Nusra is the only rational choice left for the international community." However, as support for Western collaboration with Nusra rises, there continue to be "reports of atrocities committed by Nusra, including the killing of prisoners and the alleged execution...of more than 20 Druse villagers by a local commander following an altercation over a house." According to the Lebanese labor minister and prominent Christian politician Sejean Azzi, "We refuse the choice between ISIS and Nusra, We want to choose between democracy and dictatorship, not between terrorism and terrorism. If the Syrians have to choose between ISIS, Nusra or Assad, they will choose Assad." (Wall Street Journal June 11, 2015)

MILITIAS OPPOSE ISIS IN LIBYA

In 2011, Libya was thrown into chaos by an uprising that ousted long-time dictator, Colonel Muammar el-Qaddafi. Four years later, the North African nation has once again been ravaged by conflict, this time between two militias, one based in Misurata and allied with some Islamists and the other based in the east and allied with anti-Islamist military leader, General Khalifa Haftar. United Nations mediators are pressing both sides to form a unified government that would be better able to combat the Islamic State presence in Libya. While this objective may be seem distant, according to residents of Darnah, an Islamist stronghold, "[a] coalition of Islamist militias...has vowed to eliminate a local unit of the Islamic State." (New York Times June 10, 2015)

MORE TROOPS TO IRAQ TO FIGHT ISIS?

Last week, the Obama administration announced the opening of a new American base in Anbar province, an Islamic State stronghold, along with the addition of 450 U.S. troops. White House officials stated that they would evaluate whether the new Anbar base helps to coordinate the war effort and, if it is deemed useful, would consider replicating the approach in other regions of Iraq. However, despite the Obama administration's step forward, policymakers remain divided on how best to combat the Islamic State: "Supporters of a more robust effort against the [terrorist organization] called it a welcome if inadequate step to make good on the White House's vow to defeat the Islamic State, while critics warned of sliding into a broader, bloodier and ultimately ineffective campaign." (New York Times June 11, 2015)