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Related Categories: Afghanistan; Europe; Middle East

VIENNA TAKES AIM AT POLITICAL ISLAM

In what promises to be a deeply controversial move, Austria's government has announced plans to shutter a number of mosques and potentially expel dozens of foreign imams from its soil. The initiative is being termed "just the beginning" of a larger push by the right-wing coalition government of Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, which is seeking to operationalize the country's 2015 "Law on Islam" and use it to curtail migration into the country in coming months. "Political Islam's parallel societies and radicalizing tendencies have no place in our country," Kurz asserted in announcing the move. (Reuters, June 8, 2018)

THE ISLAMIC STATE'S OTHER CADRES

So far, world attention has focused primarily on the adult male foreign fighters that have mobilized and joined the ranks of the Islamic State terrorist group. As a result, the number of women and minors who have joined ISIS has been "significantly underestimated." That's the conclusion of a new report from King's College London, which posits that female and child "alumni" of the Islamic State represent a distinct - and serious - threat. According to the study, authored by researchers at the College's International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR), roughly 13% of the more than 41 thousand foreign fighters in the ISIS "caliphate" were women, while another 12% were minors. These cadres, the authors argue, represent a potentially different threat as the group's stronghold in Iraq and Syria collapses and its foreign forces return home to their respective countries of origin. (London *Guardian*, July 23, 2018)

JORDAN GRAPPLES WITH SYRIAN SPILLOVER

In 2014 and 2015, the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria caused widespread worries among regional states regarding their own internal stability. Now, the collapse of the ISIS "caliphate" is generating similar concerns. The Jordanian army has announced that several Islamic State fighters had been killed while trying to cross the country's 375-kilometer common border with Syria. The Army unit described using "all types of weapons" to attack the militants in a fight that lasted nearly 24 hours near the Yarmouk Valley. The clash followed weeks of bombings of ISIS forces by the Russian-backed Syrian army - a campaign that has driven the group's fighters toward Jordanian territory. Jordanian forces continue to conduct operations near the border in an attempt to drive out the remaining ISIS fighters, of whom there is estimated to be between 1,000 to 1,500 near the Yarmouk Basin. (Reuters, August 2, 2018)

AN UNLIKELY UNION IN AFGHANISTAN

Pitched fighting between Taliban forces and Islamic State militants in northern Afghanistan has led to the surrender of at least 200 ISIS fighters, local authorities have confirmed. The battlefield victory was the result of a massive influx of Taliban irregulars into the country's Darzab and Qush Tepa districts, which had previously been ISIS strongholds, as part of an intensifying campaign by the Afghan Islamist movement to oust the Islamic State's foreign radicals.

The Taliban's focus, in turn, has benefited the country's beleaguered government - and nudged Kabul and the outlaw movement into an uneasy alliance. Local observers say that the Taliban - which previously waged a pitched campaign for political supremacy with the Afghan government - is now getting something akin to a "free pass" from authorities as they battle ISIS. "As they say, 'an enemy of an enemy is a friend,'" notes Faqir Mohammad Jawzjani, the head of provincial police in Jawzjan. "Both Kabul and the Taliban want to defeat IS and it is likely that in some cases they help each other out to achieve this goal." (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, August 1, 2018; Berlin *Deutsche Welle*, August 3, 2018)

WORRIES OVER WAHHABISM IN KUALA LUMPUR

After less than a year, the Malaysian government has ordered the immediate closure of a Saudi-funded counterterrorism center in Putrajaya. The King Salman Centre for International Peace (KSCIP) was first proposed during Saudi King Salman Abdul Aziz's 2015 visit to the country, and the facility was formally inaugurated last year. But worries on the part of the Malaysian government regarding Saudi Arabia's official continued endorsement of Wahhabism, and fears that the center could contribute to its spread, has led the Prime Minister Mahatir Mohamad to close the Centre and transfer relevant functions to the Malaysian Ministry of Defense. (Kuala Lumpur *Free Malaysia Today*, August 6, 2018)