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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Islamic Extremism; Terrorism; Africa; Central Asia; Iraq; Middle East

TAKING STOCK OF THE YAZIDI TRAGEDY

Now that the Islamic State has been mostly beaten in Iraq and Syria, international investigators are assessing the human toll exacted by the Islamist group. A multi-nation team of lawyers and specialists is now operating under a United Nations mandate with the goal of collecting and documenting acts carried out by the Islamic State that could constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. The evidence collected in this fashion is intended to be used by regional governments - most directly that of Iraq - to subsequently prosecute ISIS militants under their control. In particular, the UN probe is focusing on the grisly details surrounding the Islamic State's campaign of genocide and war crimes against Iraq's Yazidi community - with the goal of forcing captured ISIS members to stand trial for the atrocities. (Reuters, December 12, 2018)

CALLING BACK KAZAKH MILITANTS

Civilians in Zhezkazgan, an active militant fighter recruitment zone in the Central Asian nation of Kazakhstan, are attempting to bring their loved ones home from the Middle East. The so-called militant "hot spot" has been a notable source of Islamic mobilization in recent years, with more locals traveling from there to Syria and Iraq to join the ranks of the Islamic State than from any other part of the former Soviet republic. In response, family members have tried various methods - from enlisting the help of local religious leaders to travel to Syria themselves - in an attempt to bring their relatives home. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, December 5, 2018)

ISIS FINDS FERTILE SOIL IN AFRICA

Mimicking methods previously used to great effect by Islamic militants in Iraq, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) is extending its foothold in the Sahel. In a new analysis, Emily Estelle of the American Enterprise Institute notes that ISGS "has increased its recruiting base and area of operations by embedding itself in local conflicts in West Africa's Sahel region." The growth of the group, which formed in 2015 as an offshoot of one of the affiliates of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, has accelerated in recent months as the group has embraced the approach of militants like the late Al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, exploiting sectarian divisions among local populations. The ISGS expansion, Estelle notes, is significant for another reason as well: it "demonstrates that current U.S. and European counterterrorism efforts are failing to prevent the growth of the Salafi-jihadi movement in Africa." (AEI *Critical Threats*, October 5, 2018)

TRUMP'S PULLOUT PLANS PROMPT PENTAGON CONTINGENCIES

President Trump's largely unexpected December decision to rapidly withdraw some 2,000 American troops from Syria has reconfigured the contours of the Global Coalition's fight against the Islamic State. In the wake of the President's announcement - and amid widespread worries in Washington over future U.S. counterterrorism capacity - the Pentagon is now said to be contemplating the repositioning of Special Forces units onto Iraqi soil, from where they would operate in "small teams" and "surge" into Syria to carry out any further operations against IS, as necessary. Reportedly, Pentagon planners are also contemplating how the U.S. can best maintain its support for the Syrian Democratic Forces, a militia of Kurdish and Arab forces which has been among the most successful actors on the ground against IS. These potential strategies are set to be presented to President Trump by the Defense Department in coming weeks. (*New York Times*, December 21, 2018)

WHAT TO DO WITH ISIS DETAINEES?

Fresh off formally declaring victory in its struggle against the Islamic State, Iraq's government now needs to figure out what to do with more than a thousand captured fighters from the terrorist group. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has reportedly handed over roughly 1,400 ISIS militants to the federal government, and is preparing to extradite still more. Iraqi federal authorities and their Kurdish regional counterparts have set up a coordinating committee to oversee the process, which stems from arrests and detentions made by the KRG on the basis of evidence gathered by regional investigators against the detainees. (Riyadh *Al-Arabiya*, December 25, 2018)