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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Islamic Extremism; Terrorism; Afghanistan; Europe; Iran; Iraq; Israel

ISRAEL'S ANTI-TERRORIST FENCE

Last month, Israel's Defense Ministry announced the construction of a galvanized steel barrier along its border with the Gaza Strip as part of stepped-up efforts to prevent terrorists from entering the country. Once completed, the new fence will span 65 kilometers, and run parallel to the country's underground naval barrier, which was erected several years ago to prevent maritime infiltrations by the Hamas terrorist group. Israeli military officials have explained that these measures are necessary innovations to keep pace with changing terrorist tactics, and will include "an additional component for the defense of communities in the Gaza border vicinity." (*Jerusalem Post*, February 3, 2019)

BRITAIN'S PLAN FOR ISIS "CUBS"

Amid ongoing turmoil over its likely impending break with the European Union, the British government is grappling with a new problem in the arena of counterterrorism - namely, what should be done with ISIS "cubs," those children brought to combat zones by their parents where they were trained and forced to fight. A network of social services is now reportedly being organized by British authorities to ease the transition process for these minor returnees. But the efforts remain highly controversial, with some critics warning that an influx of these "cubs" - who number roughly 50, and have experienced varying levels of indoctrination - could heighten the domestic terror threat in the UK. (*Financial Times*, January 25, 2019)

HEZBOLLAH FEELS THE HEAT

As the economic climate in Iran worsens as a result of stepped-up U.S. sanctions, the Islamic Republic's main terror proxy is feeling the financial pressure. Pay cuts to salaries of as much as 40 percent have been implemented across Lebanon's Hezbollah militia, leading to growing frustration among affected employees (including those involved in the group's media apparatus). The extent of the economic pressure has led the organization's spiritual head, Hassan Nasrallah, to take the unprecedented step of publicly urging its followers to increase their contributions to the cause. "The resistance needs your support... because we are in the heart of the struggle," Nasrallah said in a recent, televised address on the group's dedicated channel, *Al-Manar*.

Hezbollah's woes are bigger than the sanctions on Iran, however. "Although Tehran's financial support of the Lebanese group has tripled since the beginning of its involvement in the Syrian war - reaching \$700 million in 2018, according to Sigal Mandelker, the US Treasury under-secretary for terrorism and financial intelligence - it still is not enough to keep the organisation afloat," writes the UAE's *The National newspaper* in a house editorial. "Hezbollah deployed an estimated 7,000 fighters to prop up the regime in Syria. It also had to build a costly arsenal. This whole enterprise has been a tremendous drain on the group's budget. However, as the war draws to a close, that burden will eventually be lifted, making strict sanctions all the more essential." (*Algemeiner*, February 1, 2019; Associated Press, March 8, 2019; Abu Dhabi *The National*, March 10, 2019)

ISRAEL'S RESPONSE TO "PAY TO SLAY"

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced in February that Israel will begin penalizing the Palestinian Authority (PA) for its bankrolling of terrorists and their families. Under the program, popularly known as "pay to slay," the families and dependents of terrorists incarcerated in Israel as a result of their actions receive monthly welfare payments - the generosity of which increases in proportion to the severity of the perpetrator's crimes. Under the new Israeli policy, the government will deduct from its monthly subsidies to the PA a commensurate amount to the "welfare payments to terrorists and their families" being provided by Palestinian authorities. The Palestinian government, for its part, has protested the move, saying that Israel's payments to the PA belong to the Palestinian public, and that any deduction would be a "violation of Israeli obligations in accordance with signed agreements." (*Jerusalem Post*, February 10, 2019)

A SECOND ACT FOR ISIS IN AFGHANISTAN?

Amid plans for a U.S. withdrawal, residents in eastern Afghanistan are bracing themselves for what they see as an inevitable expansion of Islamic State activities. Under-resourced for the coming fight, local militias are the last (or only) line of defense against the threat, given that the Afghan army is already overburdened by its ongoing conflict with the Taliban, which is experiencing a renaissance of its own. The surge in violence has already begun, with ISIS defectors being targeted for assassination amid more frequent attacks on civilians. (Doha *Al-Jazeera*, February 11, 2019)

STILL FERTILE SOIL FOR ISIS IN IRAQ

Although the Iraqi government has claimed victory against the Islamic State, mounting signs suggest that the terrorist group continues to maintain an active presence in the country. Of particular worry is the sense that ISIS militants are progressively "winning the war for hearts and minds" among many Iraqi citizens, in part because of the government's adherence to anti-terrorism laws which many locals believe unfairly target Sunni Muslims. Others feel that government security forces and independent sectarian militias (many of whom are supported by Iran) "have returned to some of the practices that originally fed the ingrained sense of local grievances" - a state of affairs that has allowed ISIS to exploit the resentment of disgruntled local populations. (*New York Review of Books*, February 13, 2019)