



GLOBAL ISLAMISM MONITOR

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Ideological Trends in the Islamic World

## Global Islamism Monitor No. 67

June 25, 2019 Ilan I. Berman, Jacob McCarty, Noa Seligsohn

**Related Categories:** Turkey; Central Asia; Afghanistan; Southeast Asia

### SITTING DUCKS IN SYRIA

Moscow's ongoing military campaign in Syria is making Russian forces the target of local extremists. Russia's military has divulged that its troops stationed in Syria's contested Idlib province have been targeted in three separate, large-scale attacks by Islamist militants in recent weeks. According to Russian authorities, the attacks involved no fewer than 500 extremists affiliated with the so-called Nusra Front Islamist group. (*The Moscow Times*, May 22, 2019)

### HOW ISIS PLOTTED TO PENETRATE THE U.S.

An ISIS defector captured in Iraq has revealed how he had been recruited by ISIS in 2016 to carry out a terrorist attack on New York financial institutions via the U.S.-Mexico border. According to Abu Henricki, a Canadian citizen who holds dual citizenship with Trinidad, the elaborate plot involved smuggling English-speaking radicals into the U.S. via the country's southern border with Mexico, with the objective of making their way to the Tri-State area and launching attacks to "cripple the U.S. economy."

The revelations come in a new study authored by the International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism, and highlight the ongoing efforts by radical groups to penetrate the United States - including by embedding operatives among the flow of refugees entering the U.S. from various quarters. "This account is not a warning bulletin for an imminent attack against our country, nor is it a fear-mongering attempt to suggest a wave of ISIS terrorists are waiting to cross our southern border," the study's authors note. "But a reminder to diligently consider leads and sources that confirm terrorists' intentions to exploit one of the weakest links in our national security - our borders." (*Fox News*, June 6, 2019)

### TURKEY SPREADS ITS IDEOLOGY ABROAD

All over the world, thousands of mosques are being built and funded by the Turkish government. These construction projects are part of Ankara's global strategy to extend its influence, using its own brand of state-led Islam to reach out to global Turkish diasporas. While some governments, like that of Albania, have little to fear from this Turkish expansionism on the religious front, others are not so insulated - and as a result have been hesitant to facilitate the intrusion of Turkish influence by way of Islam. The Turkish government's soft power outreach, however, is nonetheless influential; fully a third of the mosques in Germany are now estimated to have ties to the Turkish state. (*The Atlantic*, June 1, 2019)

### ISIS EXPANDS IN AFGHANISTAN...

Following a recent wave of attacks in Kabul, U.S. and Afghan security officials have divulged that ISIS has set up a base in the remote mountains of Afghanistan and expanded to other strongholds in the country's northeastern provinces. The repositioning is strategic, permitting the group's members to more easily plan attacks, increase recruits, and stockpile weapons, with the goal of plotting more external attacks on the United States and other Western countries. The Islamic State now arguably ranks as an even bigger threat than the Taliban movement in Afghanistan - creating the paradoxical situation where some have come to view the latter as a partner in the fight against the former. (*Military Times*, June 21, 2019)

### ...AND REARS ITS HEAD IN KASHMIR

Islamic State media outlets have announced that the group has established a caliphate in the disputed Kashmir region between India and Pakistan as part of what appears to be an organizational pivot to South Asia. The announcement follows an uptick in violence in Kashmir between Indian authorities and local terror elements, and the group's new "Wilayat al Hind" has claimed responsibility for a recent attack on Indian soldiers in Amshipira. Analysts remain skeptical that the Islamic State will be able to establish anything resembling governance in its new "province," but warn that the move should not be taken lightly. "The world may roll its eyes at these developments, but to jihadists in these vulnerable regions, these are significant gestures to help lay the groundwork in rebuilding the map of the IS 'caliphate,'" says Rita Katz of the SITE intelligence group. (Reuters, May 11, 2019)

[EDITORS' NOTE: Notably, few additional details have emerged regarding the size, location and strength of the new ISIS "wilayat," suggesting that the group's presence on the Indian subcontinent remains more aspirational than actual - at least for the time being.]