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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Europe Military; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Islamic Extremism; Terrorism; China; Europe; Israel; Middle East

A STEP FORWARD FOR THE SAUDI "WAR ON TERROR"

Security forces in Saudi Arabia have reportedly captured the leader of the Yemeni branch of the Islamic State, Abu Osama al-Muhajer, after raiding a house in the Mahfad district. Three additional members of the extremist group, including its chief financial officer, were seized during the raid, along with various weapons, ammunition and telecommunication devices, in what local officials are calling a "significant blow to the terrorist group Daesh (ISIL), especially in Yemen." (Reuters, July 22, 2019)

[EDITORS' NOTE: Al-Muhajer's capture is significant for another reason as well. It provides a rare glimpse into counterterrorism cooperation between Washington and Riyadh - a relationship that remains robust despite the ongoing political fallout surrounding the Saudi killing of opposition journalist Jamal Kashoggi in Turkey last Fall. Indeed, the United States is said to have provided support for the Mahfad operation as part of "worldwide efforts to continue the fight against ISIS branches and networks."]

THE LIMITS OF BAHRAINI COUNTERTERRORISM

In an important indicator of the evolving counterterrorism conversation in Bahrain, the Kingdom's top court recently overturned a governmental decision to strip citizenship from 138 nationals found to be affiliated with the local chapter of Lebanon's Hezbollah militia. While those 138 militants received varying sentences, ranging from life imprisonment to complete acquittal, the court stopped short of revoking their Bahraini nationality. The decision to prosecute these individuals and simultaneously allow them to retain their citizenship comes on the heels of reports that Iran, via its clerical army, the IRGC, was facilitating the formation of terror cells in the country. (Riyadh *Al Arabiya*, June 30, 2019)

BEIJING'S "ORWELLIAN" XINJIANG CAMPAIGN

China's ongoing campaign of repression against its Uighur Muslim minority continues to expand - and intensify. A million or more Muslims in China's autonomous province of Xinjiang are now believed to be detained in "reeducation" camps in what human rights watchdogs have termed "the largest mass incarceration of a minority population in the world today." China's pressure on the province, which Beijing sees as particularly prone to radicalization, is still increasing, however; newly-instituted measures have led to the separation of Uighur children from their parents and increasingly pervasive surveillance and monitoring of Xinjiang residents. The result, according to one reporter, is "absolute Orwellian style surveillance" that has instilled a climate of pervasive fear in China's westernmost province. (CBS News, July 3, 2019)

GERMAN MOSQUES AND CULTURAL CENTERS TIED TO HEZBOLLAH

Hamburg's regional intelligence agency has reported 30 mosques and cultural center in Germany have ties to terrorist group Hezbollah. These mosques and centers are primarily being used to raise funds, which are ultimately "used by the Iranian regime to support Assad's violence in Syria and sponsor terrorism around the world." U.S. lawmakers and the Trump administration have urged Berlin to outlaw the Lebanese group - which is now estimated to have more than a thousand supporters and members in the country. (Fox News, July 22, 2019)

HAMAS SHIFTS ITS INSURGENT STRATEGY

An underground barrier being built by the Israeli government along the country's border with the Gaza Strip will soon force Palestinian terror group Hamas to change its tactics. According to Israeli officials, the group's arsenal of short-range rockets is growing, and it is developing the capability to use sea-based terror commando cells. Additionally, Hamas has developed a rudimentary drone capability, and hopes to field armed "drone fleets" in the future.

These initiatives, in turn, are being fueled by the rapid pace of the Israeli government's construction project (the 40 mile barrier in question is expected to be completed by the end of the year). As a result, observers say, we should expect to see an increased number of missile attacks into Israel, more conflict along the country's Mediterranean shores, and, possibly, the tactical incorporation of drones into Hamas' war against the Israeli state. (JNS.org, July 11, 2019)