



## Global Islamism Monitor No. 72

November 5, 2019 **Ilan I. Berman, Jacob Thompson, Rebecca van Burken**

**Related Categories:** Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Islamic Extremism; Terrorism; Middle East; South Asia; Southeast Asia

### PAKISTAN'S ISLAMIST VOICE

Maulana Fazlur Rehaman, the leader of Pakistan's *Jamiat Ulma-e Islam* (JUI) political party, is rising in prominence on the national scene. Rehaman is the sole remaining Islamist political leader who has not yet been imprisoned by the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan and, as such, has become something of a unifying figure among the country's disparate religious political opposition parties. He is also a decidedly radical activist; Rehaman has said that he is "determined to march on Islamabad" and has threatened to bring the capital to a standstill over a range of grievances - among them economic decline and state repression - that have intensified since Khan's *Pakistan Tehreek-e Insaaf* (PTI) party gained power last year. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, September 4, 2019)

### THE AL-HOL NIGHTMARE

Al-Hol, a refugee camp in northeastern Syria for those displaced by the country's long-running civil war, is fast emerging as ground zero for a new "revenge generation" of Islamic radicals. The camp's demographics are dominated by women and children, many of whom hail from the families of ISIS fighters. In March 2019, the camp's population jumped from 9,000 to 70,000 — 50,000 of whom were minors. As living conditions and crime within the camp worsen, the women of al-Hol have taken to enforcing the Islamic State's "draconian" application of *sharia* law on its residents.

This radicalism, in turn, is fostering a *laissez faire* attitude from the international community, with disastrous results. With internal camp *fatwas* mandating that Muslim female aid workers wear the *niqab* or be punished "by the sword," al-Hol has developed a reputation as being "uniquely dangerous" for foreign aid organizations. These groups are now reluctant to enter the camp, further fostering its internal state of lawlessness. (*CNN*, September 12, 2019)

### AL-QAEDA, RESURGENT IN SYRIA

While the lion's share of media attention of late has focused on Turkey's invasion of northern Syria and the new correlation of forces there as a result of America's withdrawal, other dynamics are reshaping the Syrian theater as well. According to U.S. counterterrorism officials, recent weeks have seen a resurgence of the Bin Laden network's presence in the country. U.S. counterterrorism officials say that Russian air defenses deployed in defense of the Assad regime have inadvertently created a protective bubble for al-Qaeda affiliates like Hurras al-Din and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. While ideological schisms separate the groups from one another, and Hurras al-Din represents the larger tactical threat, analysts say both groups are now benefitting from the fallout of the Syrian civil war and the vacuum left behind by the retreat of ISIS. (*New York Times*, September 29, 2019)

### THE LONG FIGHT AGAINST SALAFI-JIHADISM

U.S. counterterrorism strategy needs to adapt to embrace a multi-generational approach to the global Salafi-*jihad*i movement, a leading analyst has argued. In a new study for the American Enterprise Institute, Katherine Zimmerman advocates for "[c]hanging the framework from one of targeting terrorism to targeting the ties that the Salafi-*jihad*i vanguard has built." This, Zimmerman says, requires recognizing underlying communal factors that have enabled the spread of Salafi-*jihadism* - ranging from local grievances to poor governance to a lack of access to basic services. These shortfalls provide key openings that radical Islamist groups exploit to build up their standing and appeal among local communities. Therefore, says Zimmerman, that is where the United States and its international partners need to devote their attention in order to delegitimize the global Salafi-*jihad*i movement via "stabilization and conflict prevention efforts, political and diplomatic efforts, and democracy, human rights, and labor programs."

This, by necessity, is a long game, Zimmerman acknowledges. It will require steady funding from Congress and ongoing support from the Executive Branch. But it is vital, because Salafi-*jihad*i networks think on a generational scale, rather than simply from election to election. That means, concludes Zimmerman, that if the U.S. hopes to truly combat Islamic extremism over the long term, it will need to match this thinking and plan accordingly. (American Enterprise Institute, October 8, 2019)