



# Global Islamism Monitor No. 75

January 24, 2020 **Ilan I. Berman**

**Related Categories:** Democracy and Governance; Europe Military; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Islamic Extremism; Afghanistan; Africa; Iran; Israel; Middle East

## GERMANY SEEKS TO BRING MUSLIM EDUCATION HOME

In Germany, a government-funded, university-based education start-up hopes to jumpstart homegrown *imam* training. The move is a practical one; most Muslim clerics based in Germany are of Turkish origin and are affiliated with the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs, which is funded directly by the Turkish government and which sends clergy to other countries. This arrangement has raised fears of undue foreign influence on Germany's Muslim population - which, at some five million, represents the second-largest in Europe. Authorities in Berlin are now looking to mitigate that vulnerability by training would-be *imams* internally as part of a broader, long-term strategy to insulate their Muslim minority against potentially radical foreign ideas. Notably, the start-up would be the first of its kind. While Islamic theology is now taught in German universities, there as yet exists no local institution for the instruction of *imams*. (*Deutsche Welle*, November 21, 2019)

## TURKEY'S "BLIND EYE" TOWARD PALESTINIAN RADICALISM

Israeli police interrogations recently made public to the press reveal that operatives of Hamas have established a significant logistical base in the Turkish metropolis of Istanbul. A December expose by Britain's *Telegraph* newspaper lays out that leaders of the radical Palestinian movement "are using Turkey's largest city to direct operations in Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank," among them the attempted assassination of Jerusalem's mayor, Nir Barkat, last year. The activities are said to be taking place with the knowledge of the Turkish government, which has chosen to turn a "blind eye" to the radical activism - and even to abet it. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan reportedly met with Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh in recent weeks, and has said that - despite pressure from both Israel and the United States - his government "will keep on supporting our brothers in Palestine."

The revelations tee up a new potential point of conflict in the already-fraught ties between Israel and Turkey, as well as in the rocky strategic partnership between Ankara and Washington. As the *Telegraph* notes, "Turkey agreed in a US-brokered 2015 deal with Israel to stop Hamas planning attacks from its soil but has consistently failed to honour the agreement." (London *Telegraph*, December 17, 2019)

## HOW TEHRAN COULD TORPEDO AFGHAN PEACE

U.S. analysts are concerned that Iranian meddling could complicate Washington's attempts to seek an exit from Afghanistan. The Trump administration has made a drawdown of U.S. forces in Afghanistan a significant priority in recent months, but another conflict - the unfolding confrontation between Washington and Tehran - could make that objective more difficult to achieve. Specifically, in the aftermath of the January 3rd killing of General Qassem Soleimani, head of the regime's feared Qods Force, his deputy, Esmail Ghaani, has been tapped to lead paramilitary arm. Ghaani's appointment, in turn, could signal plans by Tehran to ramp up operations on the territory of Iran's eastern neighbor, where Ghaani himself is known to have significant operational experience.

The problem is a vexing one. For nearly a decade, the Qods Force has trained and armed Taliban militants as part of its asymmetric war with the United States and the established Afghan government in Kabul, and its efforts have helped to stymie a durable resolution to the long-running conflict in that country. A redoubling of Iran's destabilizing activities could further jeopardize the possibility of peace, something which Washington has been quietly promoting by facilitating a broader dialogue between the warring factions. (*Military Times*, January 14, 2019)

## ISLAMISTS ADVANCE IN BURKINA FASO

North African Islamist groups allied with Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State have killed over 250 civilians in 20 separate attacks throughout Burkina Faso since April of 2019, according to a January report from Human Rights Watch. The victims of these attacks were targeted based on their affiliation with "the government, the West, and their Christian beliefs." The report, citing witness interviews, outlines that the attacks have become bolder in nature in recent times. Previously, these groups only attacked people in Burkina Faso's northern Sahel region, but more recent attacks and ambushes have occurred further south - a possible indicator that the attackers are spilling over from Burkina Faso's northern border with Mali, where Islamist groups have been active for nearly a decade. (Human Rights Watch, January 6, 2020)

