



Global Islamism Monitor No. 77

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Islamic Extremism; Terrorism; Global Health; Afghanistan; Middle East; Southeast Asia; West Africa

INDONESIA VERSUS RADICAL ISLAM

As part of its domestic counterterrorism campaign, the government of Indonesian president Joko "Jokowi" Widodo has decided not to repatriate hundreds of its citizens who had previously traveled to the Middle East to join the ranks of the Islamic State terrorist group. The decision comes amid a broader push in Jakarta for local security, with the Jokowi administration seeking to keep the nearly 700 Indonesian nationals currently detained in refugee camps in Syria out of the country. The country's Chief Security Minister, Mohammad Mahfud MD, has said that the policy would be somewhat laxer as it relates to children aged 10 or younger, whose readmittance to the country would be considered on a "case-by-case" basis. (*Arab News*, February 24, 2020)

[EDITORS' NOTE: The Jokowi government's decision is part of an effort to prevent the spread of Islamism, which authorities there have termed a "virus," throughout the Indonesian archipelago. The move, however, has raised serious questions about Indonesia's current level of responsibility to its own citizens, and the future legal status of Indonesians who have radicalized – questions which are made all the more pressing due to Indonesia's unique place in the Muslim world.]

BURKINA FASO MULLS ARMING CIVILIANS AGAINST JIHADISTS

As part of an ongoing effort to combat Islamic radicalism in Africa, the government of President Roch Marc Christian Kabore in Burkina Faso is reportedly considering arming civilians against regional *jihādists*. While the decision would be more cost effective than training and equipping more government security forces (which are already facing equipment and morale issues), the policy has drawn criticism from human rights organizations and regional observers. According to analysts at the International Crisis Group, the decision could have the effect of exacerbating existing ethnic tensions in the West African nation, and is simply a repeat of past failed security models that have previously been attempted in the region. But the debate reflects a pressing problem; the Sahel region as a whole – and Burkina Faso in particular – has seen a surge in *jihādist* activity in recent years, particularly with groups linked to Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. (*The New Humanitarian*, March 9, 2020)

IN SYRIA, LOCAL JUSTICE FOR FOREIGN JIHADISTS

The Kurdish Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria is setting up local courts to put on trial foreign members of the Islamic State terrorist group whose home countries will not take them back. The decision was born out of necessity, as those countries from which IS fighters traveled – in particular Middle Eastern and European ones – have proven unresponsive to extradition requests and suggestions that they set up international courts to try the offenders. What's more, overflowing refugee camps in the region serve as hotbeds for radical groups in the region, and local authorities fear that – unless properly managed (including by bringing former militants to justice) – those conditions could lead to renewed and even greater radicalization. (*Al-Monitor*, March 25, 2020)

THE CHILLING EFFECT OF THE CORONAVIRUS

While the coronavirus pandemic is being felt in countries across the world, the disease is also taking its toll on foreign terror groups and state sponsors of terrorism. The Islamic State, for instance, has already issued a warning to its fighters, cautioning them against travel to and attacks in Europe. Likewise, analysts believe that hostile states and non-state actors will at least temporarily tone down their targeting of Israel out of a need to manage and mitigate the spread of coronavirus. In particular, Israeli analysts say, the disease – which has hit Iran especially hard – may force that country's hostile regime to alter its strategic priorities, and may even lead to a changing of the guard among its elderly, infirm leadership. Meanwhile, in Somalia, where the al-Qaeda-linked Al-Shabaab controls large swathes of the country, the advent of the virus could lead to a diminution of the terror group's influence. (*Jerusalem Post*, March 17, 2020)

THE PRACTICAL EFFECTS OF THE TALIBAN TRUCE

As a goodwill gesture and in fulfillment of a stipulation of the recently-concluded truce between the U.S. and the Taliban, an unknown number of prisoners affiliated with the militant movement will soon be released from prisons in Afghanistan. While Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. special representative to the talks, has touted the development as a positive one, it has drawn significant criticism from observers. As per the terms of the agreement, which was concluded by the Trump administration earlier this year, some 5,000 imprisoned Taliban members are set to see freedom in coming weeks. Skeptics see the development as deeply problematic, and point to the agreement's vague language to contend that it does not do enough to curb future Taliban attacks in Afghanistan. Supporters of the new arrangement, however, point out that the peace deal also encompasses the release of up to 1,000 Afghan soldiers currently held in Taliban prisons. (*National Public Radio*, March 25, 2020)