



Global Islamism Monitor No. 82

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Islamic Extremism; Terrorism; Afghanistan; Central Asia; Europe; North Africa; West Africa

TALIBAN-AFGHAN GOVERNMENT PEACE TALKS COMMENCE

After multiple delays, the Taliban and Afghan government finally began peace talks in Doha last month. Following the signing of the U.S.-Taliban peace agreement in February 2020, intra-Afghan negotiations have been discussed but have seen little movement due to skepticism on both sides. Now, however, the parties appear to be drifting toward meaningful discussions. The development follows a prisoner exchange (involving up to one thousand Afghan security forces and as many as five thousand Taliban prisoners) that formally ended decades of war and laid the groundwork for a power-sharing government. Nevertheless, deep political divisions remain, and insurgent attacks by Taliban forces have continued unabated, jeopardizing prospects for peace. (*New York Times*, September 12, 2020)

TAJIKISTAN SENTENCES BROTHERHOOD MEMBERS

The Tajik government is continuing its crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood. Twenty more members have been sentenced to multi-year prison terms for belonging to the Islamist organization, which was outlawed by the Tajik state back in 2006. Observers have raised concerns about the murky judicial process, with defendants allegedly denied access to any sort of legal council and details of the cases kept from the public. The sentencing is part of a broader clampdown on the group on the part of the government of Tajik president Emomali Rakhmon - an effort that has seen 116 Brotherhood members detained since July. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, August 19, 2020)

SUDAN SEPARATES RELIGION AND STATE

After 30 years, Sudan's transitional government is formally ending the country's adherence to Islamic rule. Codified in a recent peace agreement signed by Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and Abdel-Aziz al-Hilu, the leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), a militant faction that fought government forces for three years, is a requirement mandating that Sudan transition from *sharia* law to secular governance. The process began gradually last year, when moral policing laws were overturned and the country's then-dictator, Omar al-Bashir, was ousted. The new agreement represents a shot in the arm for the current transitional government, which is seeking to consolidate its power while managing several ongoing crises, including floods and a sharp economic downturn. (*Bloomberg*, September 4, 2020)

[EDITORS' NOTE: The new agreement also reflects a notable shift underway in public sentiment. While Islamic-style governance is still relatively popular - 61 percent of Sudanese believe *sharia* should be the basis for most laws, according to a recent Arab Barometer poll - that support is waning; according to the same survey, younger Sudanese respondents were significantly more in favor of a limited role for religion than were their older counterparts.]

HEZBOLLAH: BANNED IN SWITZERLAND?

Switzerland may soon be the next country to designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organization. The Lebanese Shiite militia is fully blacklisted by at least sixteen nations and organizations, while a number of others have taken the step of banning the group's military wing. Switzerland, however, is more significant than most, because the organization's financial networks could lose access to the extensive and world-renowned Swiss banking system as a result. About a month ago, the Swiss federal council agreed to examine a new report on Hezbollah activities, an initiative led by the country's Christian Democratic People's Party. In addition to noting Germany's April decision to designate the organization in its entirety, the effort relies on the European Union's ban on Hezbollah's military arm to recommend a blacklisting of the group. (*Jerusalem Post*, August 23, 2020)

ISWAP STRIKES IN NORTHEAST NIGERIA

An August attack on the town of Kukawa by the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) left at least 60 people dead, including 40 civilians, and hundreds of others taken hostage by the terror group. The attack occurred in Borno, a northeastern Nigerian state that borders the Lake Chad Basin. The Lake Chad region has been the site of a recent explosion in Islamic extremist activity - the number of attacks centered there has doubled since 2017, according to the National Defense University's Africa Center for Strategic Studies. Moreover, the attack signals a potential resurgence of the Islamic State, significant elements of which have migrated to Africa since the destruction of the group's physical *caliphate* in Iraq and Syria last year. (*Al-Jazeera*, August 19, 2020)