



Global Islamism Monitor No. 83

November 18, 2020 **Ilan I. Berman, Jessie Kaplan, Jacob McCarty**

Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Intelligence and Counterintelligence; Islamic Extremism; Terrorism; Afghanistan; Europe; Middle East; South Africa

FRANCE CLAMPS DOWN

In the wake of the October beheading of a schoolteacher in Paris and the stabbing of multiple worshippers at the Notre Dame cathedral just days later, the government of French President Emmanuel Macron is hardening its approach toward Islamic extremism. In both instances, the perpetrators were Muslim immigrants to France - the murderer of schoolteacher Samuel Paty was a Chechen immigrant, while the perpetrator of the Notre Dame stabbing was of Tunisian origin. In response to the attacks, the French government will reportedly expel 231 suspected religious extremists. A reformulation of national immigration laws is also expected, as Macron's centrist government is now under pressure from the country's conservative wing to make entry into the country more restrictive. (Reuters, October 18, 2020; *BBC News*, October 29, 2020)

A MASSACRE IN MOZAMBIQUE

More than 50 people were decapitated and others were abducted by an Islamic State affiliate during a multi-day attack in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province. Known locally as *al-Shabaab*, though it "has no established links" to the Somali terror group of the same name, the militant group responsible carried out its attack over the course of three days and attacked multiple villages. The gruesome campaign was one of the most violent since 2017, when Islamic insurgents began attacking civilians and local security forces in earnest in the east African nation. However, it is also part of a larger - and deeply worrying - pattern; according to the National Defense University's Africa Center for Security Studies, 78 percent of attacks against civilians carried out by militant Islamist groups on the African continent between June 2019-2020 took place in Mozambique. (*Daily Sabah*, November 11, 2020)

SOCIETAL SHIFTS IN THE UAE

On November 7th, the United Arab Emirates announced plans to liberalize Islamic laws and modernize personal freedoms within the country. The reforms encompass a sweeping set of social changes - including allowing unmarried couples to cohabitate, loosening existing restrictions on the consumption of alcohol, and criminalizing the religious-based social practice of "honor killings." The adaptations are in part a response to societal demands from the country's younger generations, which represent more than half of the country's population of nearly 10 million. But they are also political in nature; in the aftermath of the UAE's historic normalization deal with Israel back in September, the country is attempting to boost its appeal to western tourists, businesses and other foreign investment. (Associated Press, November 7, 2020)

AUSTRIAN AUTHORITIES STRIKE BACK

Across Austria, police have searched dozens of homes and questioned people with suspected ties to Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, as well as to criminal organizations. Prosecutors in the Styria region of the country said they were investigating over 70 people for forming a terrorist organization, financing terrorism and money laundering. The raids took place in Styria, Carinthia and lower Austria in the wake of the recent deadly attack in Vienna, in which four people were killed by a gunman of Austrian-Macedonian nationality whom authorities claim is a supporter of the Islamic State terrorist group. (*Deutsche Welle*, November 9, 2020)

AFGHANISTAN: CONTINUITY OR CHANGE?

The Taliban is wagering that the U.S. elections won't change much. The radical Afghan movement believes that the peace agreement it negotiated with the Trump administration and concluded earlier this year, which formally ended the war in Afghanistan, will hold when President-elect Joe Biden is inaugurated in January. Taliban spokesman Mohammad Naeem has stated that the agreement is in the interests of the Afghan nation and of the U.S., and therefore should be implemented fully. The peace agreement depends on the withdrawal of all U.S. and NATO troops from the country by May 2021, and the Trump administration has committed to drawing down current troop levels (which stand at 4,500) still further, to 2,500, in coming days. Moreover, National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien has outlined that President Trump's desire is for all troops to "come home safely and in their entirety" by May.

That, however, might not happen. During his campaign, president-elect Biden made clear that he would maintain a small troop presence in Afghanistan to ensure that al-Qaeda and ISIS cannot regain a foothold in the country - something that is liable to become a sticking point between Washington and the Taliban. (*Voice of America*, November 8, 2020; Associated Press, November 17, 2020)