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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Islamic Extremism; Terrorism; East Africa; Middle East; North Africa; Pakistan

DEALING WITH THE ISLAMIC STATE'S NEXT GENERATION

What is to be done with ISIS children? In the wake of 2019's dismantlement of the terror group's proto-state in Iraq and Syria, both the United States and its coalition partners have grappled with the question of how to handle foreign fighters who had joined the ISIS "caliphate." A growing ancillary problem, however, surrounds the families of these radicals. Refugee camps in northern Syria, such as the notorious Al-Hol facility, have emerged as focal points for concern. Currently, the camp houses an estimated 70,000 women and children, of whom at least 12,000 are foreign nationals. As many as two-thirds of those children are under 12 years old, and their legal status is uncertain because their nationality is unclear.

Thus far, repatriation efforts by foreign nations have been minimal, and those that do exist have been woefully inadequate in both scope and intensity to provide a lasting solution to the problem. For the international community, the issue should be a pressing one, notes scholar Azeem Ibrahim in a research paper for *Arab News*. Allowing these minors to remain in their current environs has dangerous generational implications, given that Al-Hol remains largely under the Islamic State's influence and the residents there are prone to radicalization and indoctrination.

As Ibrahim notes, however, remedies do exist. One is to empower the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which currently police Al-Hol, to administer local justice by providing them "with the necessary tools to hold and prosecute those who have committed crimes." Another is to take a major effort to extricate children from the camp "at the earliest possible opportunity," given the understanding that the longer these children remain in the camps "the deeper they will become entrenched in Daesh ideology" - thereby creating a massive future security problem for the international community. (*Arab News*, February 17, 2021)

RELIGIOSITY AND MILITANCY IN PAKISTAN

Rising religiosity is contributing to a surge of militancy in Pakistan, experts say. Of late, Pakistani authorities have placed greater emphasis on religious practice and ideals as a way of fostering greater national unity. Yet this same trend has been linked to growing intolerance and a rise in militant violence in the South Asian state. "Unfortunately, instead of helping to inculcate better ethics and integrity, this phenomenon is encouraging a tunnel vision," writes Mohammad Amir Rana of the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies. "Religiosity has begun to define the Pakistani citizenry." The effect has been pronounced and includes the killings of four vocational school instructors who advocated for women's rights, and a death threat on Twitter against Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai. (Associated Press, February 27, 2021)

THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS COME TO CAIRO

Nations in the Middle East and North Africa have taken notice of the recent wave of normalization accords between Israel and the countries of both regions, and are making their own adjustments. In Egypt, for instance, the country's Ministry of Education recently approved a school course called "common values" which examines the similarities between values and verses of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. The changes were implemented as part of an ongoing official effort to mitigate extremism on the part of the government of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. Farid el-Bayadi, a member of the country's parliamentary defense and national security committee and the author of the proposal, has also called for the removal of Islamic religious texts from subjects unrelated to religion. (*Al-Monitor*, March 2, 2021)

MOZAMBIQUE LOOKS TO PRIVATE SECTOR IN WAR AGAINST ISLAMISTS

Faced with rising violence and unwilling to rely on international armies, the government of Prime Minister Carlos Agostinho do Rosário in Mozambique has turned to private contractors to revitalize its struggling military. Despite hiccups with initial hirings, contracted groups now include the Dyck Advisory Group (DAG), which has flown air support for security forces, and the Paramount Group, which reportedly provides vehicles and training. However, concerns have emerged regarding the involvement of private groups in the conflict. Groups like DAG have been accused of violating international humanitarian law in the past, while the increased number of private companies has the potential to divert focus from non-military solutions to the conflict and dilute the government's ability to control the overall response. (*Financial Times*, March 14, 2021)

