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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Islamic Extremism; Afghanistan; Europe; Iraq; Middle East; Turkey

AFGHANISTAN BRACES FOR THE DAY AFTER AMERICA

The United States is leaving Afghanistan. Last year, the Trump administration decided that it would pull all U.S. forces out of the country by May of 2021. That decision has since been affirmed by the Biden administration - albeit on a slightly longer timeline. Last month, the White House announced that all U.S. forces would be withdrawn from Afghanistan by early September of this year, in time for the twentieth anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

The American decision has sent shockwaves through the country and its warring factions. The Taliban, which has been gaining strength in recent months, has declared a preemptive victory in its attempts to retake the country. "We have won the war, America has lost," one representative of the radical militia has said. Meanwhile, Afghan government forces, which remain deeply reliant on U.S. weaponry and expertise, are bracing for continued conflict. "We must fight, there is no other option," Gen. Mohammad Yasin Zia, the country's acting Defense Minister, has insisted. "As long as the Taliban is fighting against us, and it looks like they will, then we don't have any other option." (*BBC*, April 15, 2021; *CBS News*, April 29, 2021)

THE ISIS GENOCIDE

A new investigation by the United Nations has officially confirmed that the Islamic State's campaign against Iraq's Yazidi minority in 2014 constituted genocide under international law. UN investigators found "clear and compelling" evidence that the terror group attempted "to destroy the Yazidi, physically and biologically." They also confirmed that the group "was responsible for acts of extermination, murder, rape, torture, enslavement, persecution and other war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated against the Yazidis." All told, 1,444 responsible perpetrators have been identified, and activists are now seeking to have the issue referred to the International Criminal Court. (*Voice of America*, May 10, 2021)

SAUDI MOVES TO MARGINALIZE TURKISH CURRENTS

Saudi Arabia is attempting to limit the ideological appeal of geopolitical rival Turkey within its borders. The House of Saud has reportedly ordered the shuttering of eight schools affiliated with Turkey's Education Ministry currently operating in Riyadh and other provinces of the Kingdom. The order will affect some 2,300 students currently enrolled in the institutions, who will now be forced to attend schools administered by the Saudi Ministry of Education. (*Anadolu Agency*, April 28, 2021)

AMID PROTESTS, EU TIGHTENS ONLINE REGULATIONS

A new European online anti-terror law is poised to come into effect. The measure, first floated by the European Commission in 2018, will force social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to immediately remove terrorist content - which is defined as "material inciting terrorism or aimed at recruiting or training terrorists as well as material that provides guidance on how to make and use explosives and firearms for terrorist purposes." The regulation has now been approved by the European Parliament, paving the way for it to become law among the bloc's twenty-seven members.

The new bill is far from uncontroversial, however. While originally designed as a remedial measure in the wake of "lone wolf" terrorist attacks on a number of European cities, critics of the regulation today worry that it could be used by some governments as a means to quash political speech that they disagree with. "We really are risking censorship across Europe," Vice President of the European Parliament Marcel Kolaja has warned. "[The] Hungarian and Polish governments already demonstrated they have no issues removing content that they disagree with." (*Reuters*, April 29, 2021)