



## Global Islamism Monitor No. 89

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**Related Categories:** Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Islamic Extremism; Terrorism; CAMCA; Central Asia; Europe; Southeast Asia

### **GREAT POWER COMPETITION AND THE WAR ON TERROR**

As strategic competition between China and the United States heats up, it is having a pronounced effect on U.S. military priorities. The latest example is the United States Cyber Command (USCYBERCOM), which will be shifting its resources from the fight against the Islamic State and other extremists to focus more on Chinese cyber threats. In a March appearance before Congress, USCYBERCOM commander Gen. Paul Nakasone told lawmakers that his command's joint task force would change its priorities from "counterterrorism toward heightened support to great power competition particularly in USINDOPACOM (Indo-Pacific Command's) area of responsibility." (*EurAsian Times*, May 7, 2021)

### **FRANCE FRETS OVER AN ISIS RESURGENCE**

France's top military brass is worried over what it has depicted as a resurgent danger from the world's most dangerous terrorist group. Rear Admiral Marc Aussedat, head of an elite French Navy task force in the Middle East, has said that his mission is being driven by a growing threat from ISIS, which is "regenerating" underground and developing its military capabilities anew. "Why are we doing this mission?... First of all, is to give to these forces, coalition and Iraqi security forces, the means to fight the regeneration of Daesh on the ground. Daesh is hiding, Daesh is developing its capacity underground," Aussedat recently told reporters. Aussedat's task force has deployed in support of Operation Inherent Resolve, the U.S.-led mission tasked with eradicating ISIS remnants in the Middle East. (*Newsweek*, May 10, 2021)

### **ABU SAYYAF SEEKS SANCTUARY**

Amid redoubled pressure from Manila, elements of notorious Philippine terror group Abu Sayyaf have shifted westward in Asia. Malaysian authorities recently captured eight suspected Abu Sayyaf militants in the state of Sabah on Borneo. They are believed to have fled to Malaysia in the wake of assaults by the Philippine military on Abu Sayyaf bases in the southern Philippine province of Sulu. Two of the suspects were allegedly involved in the 2012 kidnappings of a Swiss citizen and a Dutch national. The suspects had allegedly been facilitating the transfer of foreign militants to the southern Philippines. (Associated Press, May 10, 2021)

### **VIENNA TAKES A STAND ON HEZBOLLAH**

In mid-May, the government of Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz in Vienna formally outlawed Hezbollah, Lebanon's powerful Shi'ite militia and Iranian proxy, in its entirety. The decision, approved by the country's Council of Ministers, is a significant one, because European governments, as well as the European Union writ large, have long sought to create a distinction between Hezbollah's political and military wings - and outlaw only the latter. Vienna's decision is a direct rebuke to that idea. "This step reflects reality," Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg has said. "The group itself makes no distinction between the military and the political arm." Austria joins a growing number of EU countries that have already banned Hezbollah in its entirety, including The Netherlands, Germany, Estonia, the Czech Republic, and Slovenia. (*Jerusalem Post*, May 14, 2021)

### **THE CHALLENGE OF CENTRAL ASIAN REINTEGRATION**

One of the most vexing problems confronting the international community in the wake of the collapse of the ISIS *caliphate* in Iraq and Syria has been what to do about foreign fighter returnees. No uniform solution to the issue exists, and state responses have ranged from criminalization of those who joined the Islamic State (as has occurred in Saudi Arabia) to the provision of a blanket amnesty for these individuals (Tajikistan's preferred approach). Many nations, however, are now grappling with an intermediate position: how best to successfully re-absorb ISIS militants and their families back into society.

Kazakhstan is among them. The Central Asian nation has repatriated hundreds of its citizens from Syria in recent years. This cohort includes both adults and minors, including the children of ISIS militants killed in combat. Their return has kicked off a massive effort by Kazakh authorities, involving special rehabilitation facilities, psychologists, doctors and teachers, to restore these individuals to their proper place in Kazakh society. But this effort is far from uncontroversial, with many Kazakhs fearful of the returnees and viewing them as "ticking time bombs" because of their past radicalism.

The scope of the overall problem facing Kazakh authorities is significant. The country's Committee for National Security estimates that at least 870 Kazakhs left the country for Syria and Iraq since 2013, and it is unclear how many can still be expected to return. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 17, 2021)