



Global Islamism Monitor No. 91

June 18, 2021 Ilan I. Berman, Maya Walborsky

Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Intelligence and Counterintelligence; International Economics and Trade; Islamic Extremism; Terrorism; Afghanistan; Israel

THE BROTHERHOOD BREAKS RANKS

One of the most significant developments of Israel's latest round of elections was the eventual accession of Ra'am, an Islamist Arab party which finds inspiration in Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, to the "change" coalition cobbled together by conservative Israeli politician Naftali Bennett. With Ra'am's inclusion, Bennett's assembly of parties officially secured enough seats in the country's parliament, or Knesset, to unseat long-serving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his Likud party. The new government was officially sworn in on June 13th.

The decision of Ra'am head Mansour Abbas to align with Bennett - with whom he has major ideological differences - and participate in the coalition has gained plaudits from Western observers, who see the move as a heartening sign that the party is becoming a constructive participant in the Israeli body politic. In the Islamist milieu, however, Abbas' decision is receiving a decidedly chilly reception. The move prompted a formal repudiation of Israel's Islamic Movement (of which Ra'am is a part) by the Muslim Brotherhood. "The Brotherhood stresses that there is no connection - ideological or organizational - between it and this movement," the group declared in an official statement. (*Jerusalem Post*, June 9, 2021)

HEZBOLLAH'S GROWING EUROPEAN PRESENCE

Despite recent political setbacks (such as last month's blacklisting by the Austrian government), Lebanon's Hezbollah movement is still thriving on the European continent. Although officially outlawed by the German government last year, recent months have seen a surge in the group's supporters and members in the GDR. The country's intelligence services estimate that active members of the group rose from 1,050 in 2019 to 1,250 last year. Pro-Hezbollah associations are active in the cities of Hanover and Osnabruck, and in the city-state of Bremen. According to German intelligence estimates, Hezbollah "supporters from the same associations visit the same mosques," while supporters are connected to the movement "via functionaries who come from Lebanon always again for special occasions." (*Jerusalem Post*, June 5, 2021)

THE COMING FIGHT OVER AFGHANISTAN

The impending withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan threatens to turn the Southwest Asian state into a new locus for Islamists. That's the worry of a growing number of observers and counterterrorism experts. Writing in the *South China Morning Post*, Susan Sim of The Soufan Group notes that "Khorasan, a historical region that once spanned much of central Asia, including Afghanistan, and parts of Iran and Pakistan, is where some Muslims believe an army will rise to inflict a major defeat against their enemies." "The key question," Sim lays out, "is how many [foreign terrorist fighters] will flock to Afghanistan once US and Nato forces leave for good? Will they make use of Taliban hospitality to train new generations of terrorists to conduct attacks at home, and against anyone they deem to be enemies?"

The likely answer is worrisome. "For those who buy into the [Islamic State's] state-building narrative, an Afghanistan no longer propped up by the West represents another opportunity to make the virtual caliphate real again. The modern Afghan state might be able to hold onto the cities - so long as there is external financial assistance for its security institutions - while the Taliban controls much of the countryside even as it battles other local warlords and armed groups, including IS-Khorasan," the Islamic State's local franchise. (*South China Morning Post*, June 12, 2021)

THE PROBLEM WITH PALESTINIAN AID

The Biden administration's plan to resume aid to the Palestinian Authority (PA), which was halted under the Trump administration, is meeting stiff resistance from Congressional Republicans. Sen. Jim Risch (R-ID), the ranking member of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has placed a hold on some \$75 million in U.S. aid earmarked for the PA after last month's Israel-Hamas war. At issue is a 2018 law known as the *Taylor Force Act*, which prohibits the U.S. from funding the Palestinian government until it halts its "pay-to-slay" program, under which official funds are provided to terrorists and their families. That practice is still ongoing; the State Department reported to Congress earlier this year that the PA had spent more than \$150 million on terrorist benefits in the preceding year. (*Washington Free Beacon*, June 16, 2021)

