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Related Categories: Cybersecurity and Cyberwarfare; Islamic Extremism; Middle East; Pakistan

A FOILED ISIS ASSASSINATION

Although its physical *caliphate* in Iraq and Syria is now a thing of the past, the Islamic State terrorist group and its supporters still pose a threat to Western interests – and officials. The latest indication of this came last month, when the U.S. government filed formal charges against Shihab Ahmed Shihab Shihab, an Iraqi national who had plotted to assassinate former president George W. Bush. The plot, which was identified early in its planning stages, involved the smuggling of additional conspirators into the United States, as well as the exfiltration of Shihab and his compatriots via Mexico once the killing had been carried out. In conversations with confidential informants, Shihab had indicated that he maintained contacts with the Islamic State. The planned assassination was motivated by Shihab and his co-conspirators' wish "to kill former president Bush because they felt that he was responsible for killing many Iraqis and breaking apart the entire country of Iraq," the formal complaint issued by the U.S. government said. (*The Times of Israel*, May 25, 2022)

SAHEL MILITANCY SURGES

North African Islamist groups allied with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State have killed over 250 civilians in 20 separate attacks throughout Burkina Faso since April of 2019, according to a January report from Human Rights Watch. The victims of these attacks were targeted based on their affiliation with "the government, the West, and their Christian beliefs." The report, citing witness interviews, outlines that the attacks have become bolder in nature in recent times. Previously, these groups only attacked people in Burkina Faso's northern reaches, but more recent attacks and ambushes have occurred further south – a possible indicator that the attackers are spilling over from the country's northern border with Mali, where Islamist groups have been active for nearly a decade. (*Africa News*, May 20, 2022; *Africa News*, May 24, 2022; Associated Press, June 13, 2022)

ISLAMISM AND BANGLADESHI CYBERSPACE

Although Bangladesh has not experienced incidents of terrorism in recent years, the country's Islamist scene is thriving online. Bangladeshi terrorist organizations "are highly adept at using modern technology to disseminate their ideas and use magazines such as Azan, Rumiya, Dabiq, Resurgence, and Al Balagh to do so," writes Shafi Md Mostofa of the University of Dhaka for *The Diplomat*. "These magazines address Bangladeshi youth directly. Al-Qaida published Al Balagh in the Bengali language in order to expand their reach among Bangladeshis."

Militants in the South Asian state are also actively exploiting social media for both recruitment and messaging purposes. "Terrorist organizations also use different social media outlets and encrypted messaging apps to reach Bangladeshi youth. These outlets include Facebook, Telegram, YouTube and ChirpWire," notes Mostofa. The activity is ubiquitous, and alarming. "Bangladesh has over 90 million internet users and most of them are youth," explains Mostofa, and as a result the country's government "should put mechanisms in place to bring cyberspace under surveillance [in order] to tackle extremism." (*The Diplomat*, May 17, 2022)

PAKISTAN'S NEW GOVERNMENT MAKES COUNTERTERRORISM A PRIORITY

Islamabad is refocusing on terrorism. Last month, the country's Information Minister, Marriyum Aurangzeb, told the National Assembly that the government was moving to revive the activities of the country's National Counterterrorism Authority amid a surge in militancy in the country. Back in 2014, in the wake of a high-profile terrorist attack on an army school in Peshawar, the government of then-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif formulated a National Action Plan to combat militancy. The Plan was subsequently unanimously adopted by the country's legislature. Over the past four years, however, "the plan was completely ignored" by Prime Minister Imran Khan, Aurangzeb charged. It is a situation that the new government of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif – which took power in April 2022, after Khan was removed from office through a motion of no confidence – is now seeking to rectify as one of its first orders of business. (*Dawn*, May 20, 2022)

THE DETAINEE THREAT PERSISTS

U.S. officials are raising the alarm over the festering situation at detention camps in northeast Syria, where the Islamic State is seeking to make a comeback. According to Christopher Landberg, the State Department's Acting Deputy Counterterrorism Coordinator, approximately 10,000 fighters and 60,000 relatives remain incarcerated in camps in the region. "It's an unsustainable situation... and we're very concerned about it," Landberg laid out at the most recent meeting of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, held in Marrakech, Morocco. "The January attack was a perfect example of the risk," he noted, referring to an ISIS prison break in Hassakeh, Syria earlier this year. (*The National*, May 12, 2022)