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Related Categories: Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Islamic Extremism; Terrorism; Afghanistan; Russia; Ukraine

KADYROV'S WAR CORPS

Chechen strongman Ramzan Kadyrov, a key political ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, is reportedly assembling a battalion of religious warriors against the backdrop of the Kremlin's mobilization of troops for its ongoing war in Ukraine. But the fighters, drawn from a Russian Sufi order known as the Batal-Haji, may not deploy to Ukraine at all. Instead, writes Russia specialist Paul Goble, citing Russian regional sources, this force may be used by Kadyrov for distinctly domestic purposes – "both against his enemies within the Chechen nation and possibly against [the neighboring Russian republics of] Ingushetia and Daghestan against which he has made territorial claims."

"The threat that such a force would pose to Ingushetia is especially great, at least potentially, because a large share of the members of the Batal-Haji wurd [order] are Ingush," Goble notes. Thus, "[i]f Kadyrov were to use this force against Ingushetia, he might well expect support within Ingushetia for such a move." (*Window on Eurasia*, December 7, 2022)

THE ISLAMIST THREAT TO THE UK

As in other Western nations, recent years have seen the rise of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism (ERWT) in the United Kingdom. However, the primary terrorist threat to the UK remains the one posed by Islamic extremists, a new report from the British Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee outlines. "In the UK," the study, released publicly in December, reads, "the primary terrorist threat continues to be from UK-based, self-initiated Islamist terrorists or small groups, 'inspired' to conduct attacks following radicalisation from Islamist extremist propaganda, often accessed online."

Meanwhile, the "overseas" danger to British interests comes from "an enduring threat from Al-Qaeda, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and their affiliates, who aspire to direct attacks against the UK and its interests overseas." "Al-Qaeda and ISIL have exploited unstable conditions in failed or failing states to grow their networks via affiliate branches," the report lays out, and "they now operate in more theatres of conflict than ever before." (Intelligence and Security Committee of the British Parliament, December 2022)

THE TALIBAN CLAMPS DOWN FURTHER

When the militant Taliban movement swept back into power in Kabul in August 2021 on the heels of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, it pledged to govern more moderately and inclusively than it had during its first stint in power in the 1990s. It has not taken long for the Taliban to renege on those promises, however, reimposing draconian social strictures and onerous limits on expression. Afghan women have borne the brunt of this reversion to type. Last Fall, shortly after returning to power, the Taliban banned most women and girls from attending high schools. Those strictures have now been tightened further; in December, the movement formally outlawed women from attending university. The highest level of schooling now available to Afghan females is a sixth grade education. Days later, the Taliban government also banned women from working in both local and international non-governmental organizations – leading to an exodus of aid groups from the country. (*NPR*, December 20, 2022; *RFE/RL*, December 24, 2022)

HEZBOLLAH AND THE UKRAINE WAR

To prop up its war effort in Ukraine, the Kremlin has looked further and further afield for both manpower and materiel in recent months. This has included attempting to recruit fighters from Lebanon's Hezbollah militia. Those overtures, while surprising on the surface, belie a deeper relationship between Moscow and the Shi'ite militia – one nurtured over the past several years by joint support for the regime of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad. For its part, Hezbollah sees the Ukraine war as a strategic opportunity. "Near the end of Trump's presidency, the U.S. started pressuring Hezbollah, especially after the explosion at the Port of Beirut. There was serious talk that the West was planning to carry out a strike on [Hezbollah's] weapons plants in Lebanon," says former Hezbollah official Sheikh Abbas al-Jawhari. "But then the war in Ukraine happened, and now the West is fully invested there. That gives Hezbollah time to make up for the losses it incurred in Syria — manpower, weapons. Even six months would be enough." Thus, while the militia has stopped short of formally endorsing Putin's war, fighters with the group have reportedly shown up on the front lines in Ukraine, at least in small numbers. (*Meduza*, December 28, 2022)