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RECOGNIZING THE HOLOCAUST...

Some eight decades after the end of World War II, the Holocaust remains a controversial topic throughout much of the Muslim World. Rejectionist leaders and movements – among them Iran's clerical regime, Lebanon's Hezbollah militia, and assorted Palestinian groups – have weaponized a repudiation of the Holocaust as part of their political opposition to the State of Israel. Other countries, however, have gravitated toward acknowledgment of – and dissemination of information about – Nazi Germany's extermination of European Jewry.

Morocco, for instance, has in recent years been vocal about the Holocaust's validity, with the country's monarch, Mohammed VI, publicly rebuking Iranian leaders for questioning the historical accuracy of the tragedy. There has likewise been a notable shift in the broader clerical consensus, and in 2020 Sheikh Mohammed al-Issa, head of the Muslim World League and Saudi Arabia's most prominent religious figure, led a delegation of scholars and Muslim leaders to the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland. Most recently, as part of this trend, the United Arab Emirates has begun incorporating instruction about the Holocaust as part of educational curricula in its schools. The decision was announced by the Emirati embassy in Washington, DC via social media in early January. (Algemeiner, January 11, 2023)

...AND REJECTING IT

The UAE's decision has been broadly lauded by Jewish groups and public policy institutes. It has not, however, been to the liking of extremists like Hamas. The terrorist group, which controls the Gaza Strip, has issued a statement condemning the decision. "We condemn and denounce the UAE embassy's announcement in Washington that its country included materials on the 'Holocaust' in its educational curricula, and we consider that support for the Zionist narrative and a form of cultural normalization," a spokesman for the group said in January. (Algemeiner, January 11, 2023)

CHINA'S "PROPAGANDA" PUSH ON XINJIANG

In recent years, China's crackdown on its Uighur Muslim minority has become the focus of intense world attention. In an authoritative report issued last Fall, the UN publicly stated that the Chinese government's treatment of the Uighurs may amount to "crimes against humanity," citing credible evidence of "patterns of torture or ill-treatment," as well as "credible indications of violations of reproductive rights" as well as indications of forced labor. The UN findings corroborate reports that over a million Uighurs have been forced into "reeducation" camps, subjected to practices like forced sterilization, and conscripted into forced labor by Chinese authorities. Successive U.S. administrations have labeled China's treatment of the Uighurs a "genocide."

Not surprisingly, shaping global perceptions about the Uighur situation has ranked high on China's foreign policy agenda for some time now. In January, as part of that ongoing effort, the PRC played host to a delegation of thirty religious scholars from fourteen Muslim countries, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, providing them a tour of its western Xinjiang province, which the Uighurs call home. The delegation, convened by the Emirates-based World Muslim Communities Council (WMCC), had its intended effect – with the WMCC subsequently issuing a statement affirming Chinese claims that its crackdown against the Uighurs is simply part of counterterrorism policy in the region. The effort drew outrage from Uighur activists, who have termed the trip "propaganda" and accused the visit of "whitewashing China's crimes." (BBC, September 1, 2022; Middle East Eye, January 11, 2023)

A GRIM FORECAST FOR 2023

U.S. analysts are warning that a comeback by the Islamic State terrorist group could come as early as this year – and cautioned about regional conditions setting the stage for the emergence of a new generation of militants more broadly. In the past year, the U.S. and partner nations have carried out extensive combat operations against ISIS in both Syria and Iraq, leading to the death of nearly 1,000 of the group's militants in those theaters. But these successes have set the stage for an ISIS "revenge campaign" against Western interests, specialists say. "As is typical, a worldwide ISIS revenge campaign is now all but inevitable, and the shape that takes will indicate where the jihadist group is most powerful," according to Charles Lister of the Middle East Institute.

Africa is an area of particular concern, given rising militancy across the continent. "Already, incoming pledges of allegiance from ISIS branches abroad have underlined the potency of the group's presence in Africa, particularly in the Sahel," Lister notes.

Meanwhile, hotbeds of potential militancy like the notorious al-Hol refugee camp in Syria have the potential to greatly exacerbate the problem. According to Gen. Michael "Erik" Kurilla, the head of U.S. Central Command, there are now more than 25,000 children at Al-Hol, who are "prime targets for ISIS radicalization." (Washington Times, January 5, 2023)