



## Global Islamism Monitor No. 104

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**Related Categories:** Islamic Extremism; Public Diplomacy and Information Operations; Terrorism; Afghanistan; China; Russia; Turkey

### CHINA'S MIDEAST FOOTPRINT EXPANDS

As part of Chinese President Xi Jinping's "Global Security Initiative," the PRC is stepping up its engagement in the Middle East on foreign policy and defense issues – and positioning itself as an alternative to the U.S. in the region. In mid-June, China's leadership received delegations from both Iran and Pakistan in Beijing for its first-ever tripartite counterterrorism talks with the two countries. The meeting involved "detailed discussions on the regional security situation, particularly the threat of terrorism faced by the region," according to the Pakistani Foreign Ministry, and yielded a joint declaration committing the parties to closer counterterrorism coordination in the region.

The summit comes amid stepped-up Chinese engagement in the Middle East – a political offensive that included its recent brokering of a peace deal between longtime regional rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran. Beijing has also broadened its contacts with the Palestinians, hosting Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas last month for a visit that yielded economic dividends for the Palestinian leader, and a reciprocal endorsement for China of its repressive domestic policies toward its Uighur Muslim minority at home. ( *Jerusalem Post*, June 13, 2023; Associated Press, June 16, 2023)

### WITH AN EYE ON NATO, SWEDEN STRENGTHENS ANTI-TERRORISM MEASURES

Earlier this month, on the eve of NATO's most recent summit in Vilnius, Lithuania, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan dropped his long-running opposition to Sweden's entry into the Alliance – paving the way for the Nordic nation to become the bloc's 31st member. The move constituted a significant reversal on Ankara's part; for nearly a year, the Turkish government had blocked Sweden's entry into the Alliance over what it said was the latter's failure to take resolute action against extremists resident in the country, most conspicuously elements of the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), which Turkey sees as a cardinal threat.

Turkey's about-face was facilitated, in large part, by recent steps taken by Stockholm, including the Swedish parliament's passage in May of a new anti-terrorism law introducing prison terms of up to four years for individuals convicted of "participating in an extremist organization in a way that is intended to promote, strengthen or support the group." If the crimes are deemed serious, the penalties can be increased to eight years behind bars under the new measure. Individuals found to be part of the leadership cadre of a terrorist group, meanwhile, can be subject to a life sentence. The new Swedish law also criminalizes financing, recruiting for, and publicly encouraging terrorist organizations, as well as traveling abroad to join them. (*Hurriyet*, May 4 2023)

### TALIBAN MISRULE INCUBATES EXTREMISM

With many Western countries currently now prioritizing "great power competition" with China and Russia on their foreign policy agendas, counterterrorism has receded as a national security priority for more than a few nations. The potential risks associated with this shift in focus, however, are considerable. A new UN report, for instance, has highlighted the increasingly alarming situation in Afghanistan, now again under Taliban control. There, terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State's Khorasan Province branch (ISK) are gaining strength. Al-Qaeda, which is closely aligned with the Taliban, is said to be establishing new training camps and rebuilding its capability to carry out transnational attacks. At the same time, ISK, which is opposed to the Taliban, has launched numerous suicide attacks against the militant movement while simultaneously transitioning into a more networked organization.

Nor are Al-Qaeda and ISK the only extremist groups active in Afghanistan. Groups like Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement/Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP) have all expanded their operations in the country, capitalizing on the Taliban's governance deficits. In all, the United Nations now estimates some twenty extremist groups to be active in Afghanistan – creating conditions that analysts say are reminiscent of the period leading up to the terrorist attacks of September 11th. (Soufan Center, June 16 2023)