



Global Islamism Monitor No. 111

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INCREASINGLY, ISIS BANKS ON CRYPTOCURRENCY

The Islamic State is expanding its influence and funding operations in Africa with the help of cryptocurrencies, the U.S. government has assessed. A recent fact sheet released by the U.S. Treasury Department outlines that cryptocurrencies like Tether have become increasingly popular tender among IS affiliates. For instance, the group's Somalia branch, one of the terror movement's most active, is relying on cryptocurrency to bankroll its operations, and is soliciting digital funds internationally. While it is also raising money by more conventional means, reliance on crypto is clearly rising, and could soon become the primary financial vehicle for the Islamic State. (*Bloomberg*, March 11, 2024)

TARGET: EUROPE

Reignited by the war in Gaza, extremist threats are intensifying throughout Europe. Since the October 7th attacks, European authorities have successfully interrupted several unrelated terror plots. Nevertheless, the threat landscape is changing – and not for the better. "Europe's terror threat isn't only growing but also coming from new sources," the *Wall Street Journal* reports. Where the continent once faced threats primarily from the Islamic State, it now confronts an interconnected network of actors that includes not only Sunni militants but also Iran and its assorted proxies, specifically Hezbollah and Hamas. To be sure, Iran has targeted its dissidents and domestic opponents abroad for years. However, the ongoing war in Gaza has created new opportunities – and the Islamic Republic and its proxies are taking advantage. According to German security officials, "donations from individuals in Europe for Hamas and Hezbollah have soared since Hamas' Oct. 7 attacks." The war in Gaza has likewise spurred significantly increased propaganda, recruitment, and online activity on the part of these groups in Europe. (*Wall Street Journal*, March 12, 2024)

DO THE PALESTINIANS STILL PREFER HAMAS?

Some six months after the start of the Israeli military campaign against Hamas in the Gaza Strip, conventional wisdom in the West has it that the terror group – whose deadly terror campaign precipitated the current war – has fallen out of favor with ordinary Palestinians. It indeed has, but apparently not by very much. In its most recent poll, the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, a respected pollster headquartered in Ramallah, found that Palestinians generally still continue to support Hamas, in spite of the collective tragedy the group has inflicted upon them over the past half-year. Specifically, 64 percent of West Bankers said that they believe the Islamist faction should remain in control of Gaza. In the Strip itself, 52 percent of people still believe the same thing.

The causes for this statistic are manifold. One reason clearly has to do with the lack of viable alternatives to Hamas rule. The same poll found that nearly two-thirds of respondents now want a new government for the Palestinians not under the control of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and its chairman, Mahmoud Abbas, and even more favor the "dissolution" of the PA altogether. Another, analysts say, reflects the expectation among Palestinians that – despite Israeli vows to demolish the group – most expect Hamas to emerge victorious in some measure from the current conflict. In other words, the persistence of support for Hamas is a function not of the group's popularity, *per se*, but a "correlation between expectations Hamas will win and support for Hamas to rule," notes the Center for Peace Communications in its latest newsletter. "What's rising is not the desire for Hamas rule but Gazans' fear that they will still be at the group's mercy when the dust settles." (PCPSR, March 2024; Center for Peace Communications, April 2024)

REHABILITATING THE TALIBAN, ONE COUNTRY AT A TIME

Slowly but surely, the international isolation of Afghanistan's Taliban movement is easing. Earlier this Spring, China became the first country to formally accept the diplomatic credential of the group's envoy to Beijing, marking an important step in its rehabilitation. Now, Russia seems to be moving in the same direction. The Kremlin has disclosed that it is engaged in "active dialogue" with the group and is working toward removing the Taliban from the country's official list of terror organizations.

The Russian decision is pragmatic. "The fact is that this is our neighboring country. In one form or another, we maintain communication with them," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has said. "We have to resolve pressing issues, which also requires dialogue... [and] They are actually the ones who are in power in Afghanistan." (*Voice of America*, April 2, 2024)