

Headlines:

- **Divergent Views Among Muslims on Extremist Groups**
- **Chinese Authorities Collecting DNA from All Residents of Xinjiang**
- **Pakistan's Perpetual Crisis**

Details:

Divergent Views Among Muslims on Extremist Groups

There is a worrying conflation of religious adherence and support for politicised Islam, seen as a gateway to extremism, according to a new study on Muslim attitudes in the Middle East. How They Believe, an in-depth look at Muslim thought and beliefs in five Arab countries by the Arab American Institute, has come up with some contentious findings. These include: a small but worrying percentage of self-described “very religious” respondents – dubbed Formalists in the report – saying they felt that groups like ISIL and al Qaeda are “mostly right” or “correct and follow a right-guided path”; whereas groups of self-described “moderately religious” – dubbed Adapters in the report – almost exclusively held the opposing view. Presented by Dr James Zogby at a peace forum in Abu Dhabi this week, the report follows up on a survey last year. Dr Zogby chose to focus on the views of those in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt this year. The survey found no major demographic differences among respondents, but there were pronounced attitudinal differences between Formalists and Adapters. Formalists largely believe that to be religious it is important to be observant and to adhere to all religious rituals. Whereas Adapters largely believe that to be religious implies living “a moral life” and being “good to others”, as opposed to strict adherence to all rituals. Dr Zogby said: “When respondents were asked if they think that groups espousing a politicised version of Islam should be seen as potential ‘gateways’ to extremism, we find the majority of Adapters agreeing that these groups are gateways and very strong majorities of Formalists (in some cases, near unanimity) disagreeing with this assertion. “The strongest agreement that groups that politicise religion lead to extremism is among Adapters in the UAE (69 per cent) and Saudi Arabia (65 per cent). On the other hand, 99 per cent of Formalists in Morocco and Egypt and 95 per cent of such respondents in Tunisia say these groups are not gateways, as do 87 per cent of Formalists in Saudi Arabia and 83 per cent in the UAE.” Mohammed Ahmad, chief executive of Global Needs Foundation, an American non-profit, said the survey showed citizens “don’t have enough education ... to distinguish between what is political and what is religious ... the burden remains on the shoulders of Muslim scholars and the governments in different countries” to address this issue. Dr Zogby’s report underlined the danger of this conflation of religious adherence with the politicisation of Islam. “Formalists are far more likely than Adapters to believe that a caliphate would be a positive development. There is near unanimity among Formalists in Egypt and Morocco (98 per cent) that a caliphate would be positive, and very strong positives among Formalists in Tunisia (93 per cent) and Saudi Arabia (87 per cent). A majority of Formalists in the UAE (57 per cent) say a caliphate would be a positive development. Adapters in Morocco (67 per cent), Egypt (62), Saudi Arabia (56), and the UAE (55) say a caliphate would be a negative development,” the report said. Majorities of respondents agree that they either do not consider groups like ISIL or Al Qaeda to be Muslim or regard them as “a misguided perversion of the teachings of Islam”. But, Dr Zogby said, “there are troubling findings when we look more deeply at the data”. Dr Naved Bakali, an analyst at Tabah Foundation, an anti-extremism think tank, said: “There is some validity to the report ... but it does not paint the full picture.” He said religious illiteracy was a greater indicator of extremism than adherence. [Source: The National]

Not matter how hard Western polls try to conflate Islam with politics, the Ummah's perception and comprehension of the Caliphate grows stronger by the day. Soon the Caliphate will be born!

Chinese Authorities Collecting DNA from All Residents of Xinjiang

Chinese authorities are collecting DNA samples, fingerprints and other biometric data from every resident in a far western region, Human Rights Watch has said. Officials are also building a database of iris scans and blood types of everyone aged between 12 and 65 in Xinjiang, adding to controls in a place some experts have called an “open-air prison”. The region is home to over 11 million Uighurs, a Muslim Turkic minority, and is occasionally hit by bouts of violence. The data can be used for “surveillance of persons because of ethnicity, religion, opinion or other protected exercise of rights like free speech”, according to Human Rights Watch. Part of the collection is being done through government-provided medical checkups, and it is unclear if patients are aware the exam is also designed to transmit biometric data to the police. Although the checks are officially voluntary, one Uighur said local cadres “had demanded that they must participate in the physicals”. A story in a local newspaper encouraged officials to “work hard to convince them to participate”. Nearly 19 million people have participated in the medical exams, dubbed Physicals for All, in 2017, according to state news agency Xinhua. For people determined to be “focus personnel” – a euphemism for those the government views as dangerous – their data will be collected regardless of age. “The mandatory databanking of a whole population’s biodata, including DNA, is a gross violation of international human rights norms,” said Sophie Richardson, China director at Human Rights Watch. “It’s even more disturbing if it is done surreptitiously, under the guise of a free healthcare program. “Xinjiang authorities should rename their physical exams project ‘Privacy Violations for All’, as informed consent and real choice does not seem to be part of these programs,” she added. Officials in the region claim the scheme is meant to improve policies aimed at poverty alleviation. They also say it is targeted at “social stability”, a phrase commonly used to describe crackdowns on government critics. In the massive effort to collect biometric data from millions of residents, police in Xinjiang bought DNA sequencers from the US company Thermo Fisher Scientific, according to Human Rights Watch. The company refused to directly address its products being used in Xinjiang, saying only: “We do expect all of our customers to act in accordance with appropriate regulations and industry-standard best practices.” Biometric data collection also applies to people originally from Xinjiang who have moved to other parts of China, where they will be required to submit their information locally. Xinjiang is one of the most tightly controlled parts of China, with the Uighur minority facing increased scrutiny in recent years. Heavily armed troops on city streets are a common sight and the authorities frequently hold mass rallies to bolster their support in the fight against the Islamic extremists Beijing blames for a series of attacks on government officials and civilians. But rights groups say most of the violence stems from restrictions on religion, culture, language and expression, as well as a lack of economic opportunities in the impoverished region. Uighurs often complain high-paying jobs are given only to Han Chinese. [Source: The Guardian]

After failing to stop the intellectual aspect of the Islamic revival in Xinjiang, the Chinese authorities have resorted to extreme measure to track the mobility of the Muslims of Xinjiang. This too will fail and Islam will dominate China with the permission of Allah (swt).

Pakistan's Perpetual Crisis

Like much else about Pakistan, it's often infuriatingly difficult to determine whether or not its economy is on the brink of disaster. This week, as the Pakistani rupee lost 5 percent of its value in just three days, it looked like trouble was brewing. And sure, this might be a sign of the economy slipping towards a balance-of-payments crisis. But, then again, it might not.

Pakistan doesn't just live on the edge, it seems altogether nonchalant about being there. The immediate cause of the rupee's slide appeared to be a decision by the State Bank of Pakistan to stop supporting its value. For months, the rupee had held steady even as Pakistan's foreign-exchange reserves dwindled; the country's stock of dollars shrunk by almost 30 percent between January and October, before it went to the market in November to sell \$2.5 billion of dollar-denominated bonds. The central bank appears not to want to play defense any more. Perhaps that's wise. Pakistan's exports have fallen for three years straight; in October, its Commerce Ministry largely blamed the plunge on an overvalued currency. Many of Pakistan's exporters are in particularly price-sensitive sectors, such as cotton. A cheaper currency could help them become competitive again. Thanks in part to weak exports, Pakistan has been running a worryingly high current account deficit — 4 percent of GDP in the last financial year, which in Pakistan ends in June. And the problem's getting worse: Between June and October of this year, the current account deficit was more than twice what it had been in the same period in 2016. These are the kind of numbers that are causing people to mutter that Pakistan might have to go again, hat in hand, to the International Monetary Fund. The country just got done borrowing \$6.7 billion dollars from the IMF last year. Of course, weak exports are only half the problem. The other half stems from consistently high imports -- chief among them the capital goods being imported from China as part of the much-heralded China Pakistan Economic Corridor. Half of Pakistan's imports from China are capital goods, and their value rose by 30 percent between 2015 and 2016. Few in Pakistan have a bad word to say about the CPEC, but it certainly seems to be creating problems for the country's economy. The IMF is right to be "appalled" at the implications for Pakistan of having to pay back billions of dollars in expensive loans to China with no export recovery in sight. But the problem, as always in Pakistan, is politics. It was politics that inflated the rupee for longer than was sensible. (It's almost an iron rule that countries with powerful elites who earn cash locally to spend in Knightsbridge tend to keep their currencies overvalued.) After the rupee's value dipped a bit in July this year, the finance minister personally intervened to change the head of the central bank. Now that finance minister's gone too -- another casualty of the corruption allegations that have decimated Pakistan's government -- and the rupee's behavior has shifted alongside the political changes in Islamabad. And it is politics that keeps the economy from reforming itself to take advantage of export markets -- and, for that matter, to benefit from whatever Chinese investment does eventually materialize. Power tariffs and subsidies have to be rationalized if the sector is to continue to improve. Tax collection has to be made more efficient. Tariffs that disadvantage domestic producers have to be straightened out. A politics dominated by feudal overlords, oligarchs and the military has led to Pakistan becoming, in the words of the Pakistan Business Council, "a nation of import-reliant traders." Only with sustained, export-oriented and private-sector-friendly reform will Pakistan break out of its cycle of overconsumption, balance-of-payments stress and foreign bailouts. [Source: Bloomberg]

As long as Pakistan continues to surrender its economic sovereignty to the likes of IMF and other creditors, the country will suffer currency crises. The only permanent solution is for Pakistan implement the bimetallic standard of gold and silver, which will give the country stability, end deflation, increase the purchasing power of the rupee and spur domestic consumption.