

Headlines:

- **From France to Denmark, Bans on Full-Face Muslim Veils are Spreading Across Europe**
- **Pakistan should Beware an Easy Chinese Bailout**
- **A US Trade War with Turkey over a Little Known Pastor? Don't Believe a Word of It!**

Details:

From France to Denmark, Bans on Full-Face Muslim Veils are Spreading Across Europe

Earlier this month, Denmark became the fifth country in Europe to introduce a ban on face coverings in public places. The policy is widely viewed as being targeted at Muslim women who wear veils such as the niqab. Despite protests in the country's capital, police have started enforcing the law in earnest. On Aug. 3, a 28-year-old wearing the niqab, which covers the entire body except the eyes, was attacked by another Danish woman who tried to pull her veil off, the Guardian reported. Police fined the Muslim woman \$156. Legislation around full-face veils has grown increasingly common in Europe, particularly in the past three years. Six countries have now passed nationwide laws that partially or fully ban face veils in public places. The latest is the Netherlands, which voted in June to partially ban face veils in locations such as schools and hospitals, but not on public streets. Several other European countries, including Spain and Italy, have banned them in individual cities and towns, and even more have reviewed proposals for bans at a local or national level. Widespread calls for legislation outlawing face veils in public places started in France, which in 2011 became the first European country to introduce a nationwide ban. At the time, French President Nicolas Sarkozy argued during a state-of-the-nation address that the burqa — a head-to-toe covering with mesh screening the eyes, mainly worn in Afghanistan — was a “sign of subservience and debasement.” “I want to say solemnly, the burqa is not welcome in France. In our country, we can't accept women prisoners behind a screen, cut off from all social life, deprived of all identity. That's not our idea of freedom,” Sarkozy said to rapturous applause from lawmakers, the Guardian reported. Another common justification for the ban is that face veils conceal the identity of the wearer, posing a security threat. In Latvia, for example, where just three women among the country's population of 2 million are estimated to wear the burqa, debates around a proposed ban on face veils have frequently featured concerns over security. In 2016, Vaira Vike-Freiberga, the former president of Latvia, told the New York Times that “covering one's face in public at a time of terrorism presents a danger to society. ... You could carry a rocket launcher under your veil. It's not funny.” Politicians also frequently contend that face veils are inconsistent with existing “European values,” mounting what experts describe as a “clash of cultures” argument. In 2017, Germany's then-interior minister, Thomas de Maizière, called for a nationwide ban on face veils in an editorial that stated: “We are an open society. We show our face. We are not burqa.” Earlier this year, while Denmark's Parliament debated the face-veil bill that would later become law, Justice Minister Soren Pape Poulsen contended that a person concealing her face was “disrespectful” to others and “incompatible with the values in Danish society.” Regardless of the justification, policies governing head veils are likely to grow more prevalent in the coming

years, particularly as European governments try to stave off the growing influence of right-wing leaders in their countries, experts said. [Source: Washington Post]

Whatever justifications western politicians provide it is their hatred for Islam that fuels the burqa ban.

A US Trade War with Turkey Over a Little Known Pastor? Don't Believe a Word of It

Erdogan's real crimes are buying the Russian S-400 missile system for Turkey, refusing to accept US support for America's Kurdish YPG allies and allowing Islamist fighters to pour over Turkey's border into Syria along with a load of weapons, mortars and missiles. It needs a stroke of genius to soften the heart for poor old Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Those of us who have always believed that Erdogan is a bit off his rocker must still be appalled that a US president infinitely more cracked than the Turkish variety is trying to impoverish Nato's second largest military ally. True, Erdogan locked up 50,000 Turks – including an American pastor, of whom more later – after the attempted coup against him two years ago, but hasn't Egypt's president/field marshal Abdel Fattah al-Sisi broken this record by banging up 60,000 supposed Islamists in his own country's prisons? Trump, who doesn't give a toss how many innocents are incarcerated or destroyed in the world, is suddenly trying to neuter Turkey – and all because Pastor Andrew Brunson remains under house arrest in there for allegedly supporting the coup plot allegedly organised by Erdogan's former colleague, the allegedly mesmeric imam Mohamed Fethullah Gulen, currently residing in Trump's own country. I don't believe a word of it. Trump made little fuss about Brunson's captivity for many months. It took him almost a year and a half to get into a tantrum about the man. So you can see how things are lining up in the Middle East right now. Erdogan has made good friends out of Putin and Iran's supreme leader and, as an opponent of Saudi Arabia, is naturally on the best of terms with Qatar, whose Emir – in a miraculous moment which even Pastor Brunson might envy – has just promised an investment of \$15bn to Turkey. Saudi Arabia's siege of Qatar is beginning to look as miserable as its war against the Shiites of Yemen. Turkish troops are stationed in Qatar to "protect" the little emirate against its larger and threatening neighbour – and we all know who that is. And, since Syrian and Qatari relations are steadily being reheated – albeit on the minutest scale – I wonder who will benefit the most. Bashar al-Assad, perhaps? Russian troops are now patrolling the Syrian-Israeli lines below the occupied Golan Heights. The Russians have promised Israel that the comparatively few Iranian forces in Syria will be kept at least 50 miles from this sector. Russia's ally Syria needs to crush the final Islamist stronghold in Idlib with Russia's help and push the province's most intransigent fighters back into Turkey. Qatar has the cash to rebuild Syria and thus extend its influence across the landmass of the Levant to the Mediterranean. If Qatar is going to pour even more billions into Turkey, then we may see some kind of strategic alliance between Doha and Ankara. And a rediscovery of the family friendship between Erdogan and Assad? [Source: The Independent]

As the Syrian end game approaches, the US is looking to rollback some of roles played by its surrogates—Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and others. The post war Syrian settlement will only take place once all the actors are playing by America's new script.

Pakistan Should Beware an Easy Chinese Bailout

As former cricket star Imran Khan prepares to take his oath as Pakistan's new prime minister Saturday, there's one thing he must be clear about: Pakistan may be China's friend at the moment, but the relationship could quickly turn sour. In the next month or so,

Islamabad may have to take another bailout package from the International Monetary Fund — the country's 13th. The State Bank of Pakistan now holds just over \$10 billion in foreign exchange reserves, giving enough room to buy only two months' worth of imports. Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves can buy only just over 2 months of imports. But the IMF route is tedious. A rescue package from the Fund would mean the usual round of economic austerity and pro-market reforms, for a prime minister who came to power promising an "Islamic welfare state." The U.S., the Fund's largest shareholder and most important decision-maker, has already said that any bailout money can't be used to pay off China, whose ambitious Belt and Road Initiative is turning Pakistan into another Venezuela. So Khan may be tempted to turn instead to Beijing or even Saudi Arabia, despite having campaigned against corruption in Chinese-funded projects. China is reported to have recently agreed to write a \$2 billion loan to ease his transition into the office, and the Saudi-backed Islamic Development Bank has arranged a \$4.5 billion loan, with the proceeds mainly to be used to pay for Pakistan's oil imports. Higher crude prices have also contributed to Pakistan's problems. It's increasingly becoming the norm for defiant strongmen to seek alternatives to the U.S.-led world order. Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has found a benefactor in Qatar, who promised to invest \$15 billion in the country Thursday to avert a financial meltdown amid a spat with Washington. So why shouldn't Pakistan join in? After all, Beijing is used to supporting financial zombies. An average local government financing vehicle has a net-debt-to-Ebitda ratio of 27 times. If the borrower can't pay, the lender just hands out more loans; that way, none of the debt shows up as bad on the creditor's books, and both sides are happy. There's one problem: Whereas a default by an obscure subsidiary of a state-owned enterprise or a small town in Inner Mongolia could send shock waves through China's entire corporate bond market, Pakistan is still a sovereign state (in the eyes of investors, if not its creditors in Beijing) so is far less likely to cause financial contagion. The fragility of China's domestic market encourages state lenders to be forgiving even as the country makes deleveraging a national economic priority. Pakistan doesn't have that backstop. In addition, lenders to Pakistan such as the China Development Bank aren't traditional commercial banks. They don't take household deposits or even follow Basel III standards. If a few loans go bad, the Ministry of Finance can just sweep the problems away, leaving China's financial system intact. From Beijing's perspective, that means there's little downside to rolling over a few bad debts, at least in the short term. But for Pakistan, the stakes are much higher. The question ultimately comes down to whether China decides to forgive a soured loan, restructure it, or resolve it another way. According to Nomura Securities, of 31 heavily indebted poor countries, China has provided relief to 28, and even generously offered full debt forgiveness to several, such as Afghanistan and Burundi. So while China's money may look easy right now, it comes with dangerous strings attached. An austerity program with the IMF would serve Pakistan better. [Source: Bloomberg]

Borrowing money from America's tool the IMF or China is always a bad idea and it will never allow Pakistan to exercise its economic sovereignty. Pakistan needs to structure its economy along Islamic lines like adopting currency linked to gold and silver, striving for domestic self-sufficiency, expelling western multinationals and making heavy industry the basis for economic independence.