

Headlines:

- **The Burkini Ban**
- **America's Afghan Governments Losses Mount**
- **Egypt-IMF Agree to a Deal**

Details:

The Burkini Ban

The French towns of Cannes, Villeneuve-Loubet and Sisco, this week banned swimwear designed for Muslim women called the Burkini. The justification for this has ranged from the burqa being a sign of oppression, the burkini raising certain hygiene issues and its link to terror groups abroad as claimed by the Mayor of Cannes. The silver lining through most statements on the issue suggest a sort of "ideological provocation" which has led to a tension in society in light of the recent attacks. However, the arguments employed display the weakness of secularism in ideologically trying to deal with the issue. For instance, the argument of association of the burqa also being worn by extremists abroad is as preposterous as saying that since the leader of ISIS wore a watch and French politicians wear watches, watches should be banned due to such an association. In reality, these straw man arguments arise as a result of the inability of secularism to intellectually deal with belief of Muslims and its manifestation in its dress. More is yet to come from this chapter of French secularism and its values vs a cloth.

America's Afghan Governments Losses Mount

The Taliban gains continue to increase ever since the US reduced its forces in 2014. Fears of the Taliban's mounting gains in the Helmand Province leaving them in control of the capital city of Lashkar Gah continue to confirm their ascendancy.

"The police, as soon as they were inflicted with some casualties, gave up about 27 posts one after another without a fight," complained Third Regiment commander Col. Nematullah Khalil, adding that his troops found their posts surrounded suddenly because of the quick losses. Police chief Lt. Col. Mohammad Omar Jan denied this, saying that the police are suffering far more casualties than anyone else, and that the army is just blaming them to cover up its own weakness in the battle, as they struggle to hold the last line of defense before the capital.

Afghan officials in Kabul insist that Lashkar Gah won't be allowed to fall, but they're leaving that task up to fighters who the Taliban are consistently defeating. Reinforcements, to the extent they were deployed at all, are slow to arrive because of substantial Taliban control in the area, and Taliban minefields.

Egypt-IMF Agree to a Deal

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) reached a preliminary agreement with Egypt on August 11 to create a three-year, \$12 billion extended fund facility to help bolster and reform the Egyptian economy.

The deal is part of a much broader program in Egypt, worth \$21 billion, which confirms, if ever evidences was needed that the military junta has completely failed on the economic front. Egypt's two previous attempts to negotiate with the IMF failed because Cairo was unwilling to make the unpopular reforms needed to seal the deal. But Egypt's financial position has been tenuous over the past five years. Today, the country's budget deficit makes up an estimated 10-13% of its GDP, and its government debt-to-GDP ratio is around 98% though the IMF plan is intended to reduce the latter figure to 88% by 2019. As of now, Egypt's \$15.5 billion in foreign reserves can cover only three months of imports, and roughly 30% of the government's budget is set aside for debt servicing.

Implementing this plan will hurt the average Egyptian who has been reeling for years due to a dysfunctional economy. The Sisi regime will have to devalue the Egyptian pound. This will drive up import costs. Moreover, the plan also includes reforms to subsidies, including for bread, wheat, fuel and electricity. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has called on the public to accept the need to make these reforms, despite the pain they will bring. For now, the president is not facing any major political challengers. The last time he was in such a strong position — in 2014, immediately after winning a presidential election — he was able to push through other controversial reforms.