

Adapting to increased military pressure, ISIL shifts to 'dark web,' UN Security Council told

7 February 2017 – The terrorist group, known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh), is on the defensive militarily in several regions, but is also adapting to military pressure by resorting to covert communications such as the 'dark web,' the top United Nations political affairs official warned today.

“Although its income and the territory under its control are shrinking, ISIL still appears to have sufficient funds to continue fighting,” Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman said, briefing the Security Council on the UN Secretary-General's fourth report on the threat the group poses to international peace and security efforts to “check and roll it back.”

Mr. Feltman noted that ISIL relies mainly on income from extortion and hydrocarbon exploitation, even though resources from the latter are on the decline. UN Member States are concerned that ISIL will try to expand other sources of income, such as kidnapping for ransom, and increase its reliance on donations, he stated.

“ISIL is adapting in several ways to military pressure – resorting to increasingly covert communication and recruitment methods, including by using the 'dark web,' encryption and messengers,” he warned.

While the previous reports on the subject have focused on South East Asia, Yemen and East Africa, Libya and Afghanistan, the fourth report zeroes in on Europe, North Africa and West Africa.



Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman briefs the Security Council on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

It notes that ISIL has conducted a range of attacks in Europe since declaring in 2014 its intent to target the region. Some of these attacks were directed and facilitated by ISIL personnel, while others were enabled by ISIL providing guidance or assistance or were inspired through its propaganda.

While the military offensive in Libya has dislodged ISIL from its stronghold Sirte, the group's threat to Libya and neighbouring countries persists. Its fighters – estimated to range from several hundred to 3,000 – have moved to other parts of the country.

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ISIL has increased its presence in West Africa and the Maghreb, though the group does not control significant amounts of territory in the region. The reported pledge of loyalty to ISIL by a splinter faction of Al-Mourabitoun led by Lehbib Ould Ali may elevate the level of the threat.

ISIL-affiliate Boko Haram is attempting to spread its influence and commit terrorist acts beyond Nigeria, and remains a serious threat, with several thousand fighters at its disposal. It is, however, plagued by financial difficulties and an internal power struggle, and has split in two factions, Mr. Feltman reported.

While the fourth report also notes some of the measures taken by Member States and the United Nations, it stresses the need to develop sustained, coordinated responses to the grave threat posed by ISIL and associated groups and entities.

Mr. Feltman said that there are 19 universal counter-terrorism conventions and protocols, as well as related regional instruments on international terrorism, and relevant UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

“But we need to do more, as Member States continue to face significant challenges to ensure effective international cooperation,” he said, warning that foreign terrorist fighters leaving the conflict could pose a grave risk to their homeland or to the countries they are travelling to or transiting through, such as Iraq and Syria’s neighbours, as well as countries in the Maghreb.

“Ultimately, it is the spread and consolidation of peace, security, development and human rights that will most effectively deprive terrorism of the oxygen it needs to survive,” he concluded.

[Fraser: Jobs boom would net SNP Government £800m](#)

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The Scottish Government would gain a near £800m budget bonus if Scotland's jobs market delivered for all working people, finance spokesman Murdo Fraser will say in a key note speech this evening.

Delivering his response to last week's SNP budget in a Reform Scotland lecture, Mr Fraser will call on the Nationalist government to focus on economic growth – saying it will deliver extra cash to the SNP Government's coffers.

Figures compiled by the party show that if all part-time workers who want a full-time job could get one, tax revenues to the Scottish Government would increase by £337m.

Similarly, if inactive people who want a job also found one, the Scottish Government would stand to gain by £435m in extra income tax.

Mr Fraser will say that this combined £772m windfall provides an illustration of the kind of budget boost the SNP would gain if it only prioritised jobs over tax rises.

The Scottish Conservatives have already shown that simply by increasing the proportion of higher and additional rate taxpayers to the UK average, the SNP Government would stand to gain £600m in extra revenue.

Instead, as part of a deal with the Scottish Greens last week, the SNP decided to set the highest income tax rates in the UK for Scotland – and failed to set out a plan to deliver economic growth.

In his speech, hosted by Shepherd and Wedderburn , Mr Fraser will say:

“As the Fraser of Allander institute point out: ‘Scotland’s economic performance – or more accurately, Scotland’s relative performance – will have a greater bearing on the spending plans of Holyrood than ever before’”

“To see what the potential benefit could be, we did some basic modelling, trying to understand what the impact would be if Scotland’s economy motored up a gear.

“If Scotland matched the UK proportions of higher and additional rate taxpayers, tax revenues would increase by around £600 million.

“If every person in Scotland currently on a part-time contract who wants to go full-time could do so – revenues would increase by about £337 million.

“And if everyone in Scotland who is currently economic inactive and wants to find a job – but can’t – if they found work, revenues would increase by £435 million.

“These figures give you a sense of potential if we grew faster, and reached UK-wide norms.

“And of course – it’s not just me saying it. Alex Salmond, remember, estimated that matching UK growth would be worth £4 billion.

“I wonder what Alex Salmond would make of Derek Mackay’s budget.

“And I miss that old SNP.

“We might have had our differences, but at least we agreed on this guiding principle of government: if you want more money for services, start with growth.

“Bairns not tax bombs, you could say.”

[Israeli legislation on settlements violates international law, says UN chief Guterres](#)

7 February 2017 – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres today deeply regretted the adoption by Israel’s legislative body, the Knesset, of the so called “Regularisation bill,” saying the measure contravenes international law and will have “far-reaching legal consequences” for the country.

A statement from the UN spokesperson noted that the bill reportedly provides immunity to settlements and outposts in the occupied West Bank that were built on privately-owned Palestinian land.

“The Secretary-General insists on the need to avoid any actions that would derail the two-state solution,” the statement said, adding that all core issues should be resolved between the parties through direct negotiations on the basis of relevant Security Council resolutions and mutual agreements.

“The United Nations stands ready to support this process,” it concluded.

[Commenting on the news that Surrey County Council is not going to hold a referendum on 15 percent council tax rise – Pearce](#)

Teresa

Pearce, Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government,

commenting on the news that Surrey

County Council is not going to hold a referendum on 15 percent council tax rise, said:

“The

Government should not be trying to deal with the national social care crisis through backroom deals with sympathetic Tory council leaders in an attempt to avoid negative publicity.

“Across

the country, people are facing steep rises in their council tax bills, whilst the provision and quality of social care is declining. Council tax rises are nothing more than a short-term sticking plaster for a problem that needs long-term solutions. And they create a postcode lottery in social care, because they raise the least money in areas with the greatest need.

“There is

an unprecedented crisis in social care, with care providers handing contracts back to councils, 1.2 million elderly people living without the care they need

and delayed discharges causing huge pressure on the NHS. The Government must come forward with a long-term strategic rethink of social care funding, as well as urgent funding to stem the crisis which is hurting elderly and disabled people right now.”

Ends

Senior UN official urges Libya to protect migrants from conflict-related sexual violence

7 February 2017 – The highest United Nations official tasked with advocating against the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war urged today Libyan authorities to protect migrants from rape and other human rights violations.

In a statement, Zainab Hawa Bangura, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, called on the Libyan Government and on the international community as a whole to protect migrants who are living or passing through Libya.

“In the course of their journey, women and girls but also men and boys face grave human rights violations, including conflict-related sexual violence, committed by parties to the Libyan conflict, as well as smugglers,

traffickers and other criminal groups,” said Ms. Bangura, who is also an Under-Secretary-General.

She noted also that migrants face sexual violence in official and unofficial detention centres, some being held “for days, weeks or months.”

In addition, Ms. Bangura voiced increasing concern about the “systematic use of sexual violence” by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Libya, a phenomenon which the office of the Special Representative has been investigating in Iraq and Syria.

“Testimony from women and children recently released from ISIL as a result of the military operation in Sirte reveals a pattern of rape and sexual slavery, particularly against migrants,” Ms. Bangura said, noting that some of the survivors are pregnant.

She voiced alarm also that most of the women and children are being detained in Al Jawiya prison in Misrata “in precarious conditions including overcrowded cells, lack of adequate access to food, water and medicine, and absence of women guards as an important protection measure.”

Among her proposals, Ms. Bangura is urging authorities to urgently review the country’s migration policy, to protect escapees from ISIL and provide them with adequate support, to assist all victims of conflict-related sexual violence with adequate medical and other resources, and to investigate and prosecute those responsible for the crimes.

She also reiterated the recommendation of the Secretary-General that all countries give due consideration to recognizing conflict-related sexual violence as a form of persecution that warrants refugee status.