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Related Categories: Islamic Extremism; Terrorism

THE ISLAMIC STATE'S SOCIAL MEDIA OFFENSIVE

European officials are sounding the alarm over what they describe as an increasingly active social media presence by the Islamic State terrorist group. According to Rob Wainwright, the director of EUROPOL, the EU's law enforcement body, ISIS is believed to have as many as 50,000 Twitter accounts, which cumulatively broadcast up to 100,000 tweets a day, many of which are logistical in nature and help to coordinate terrorist attacks.

The scope of this information effort, says Wainwright, represents a significant challenge to Western intelligence and law enforcement. "As the communications of terrorist networks and criminal groups have moved increasingly [online], it's opened up a whole new wave of problems for us," the EUROPOL director has told the BBC. "There is a significant capability gap that has to change if we're serious about ensuring the internet isn't abused and effectively enhancing the terrorist threat." (Dubai Al-Arabiya, March 29, 2015)

BOKO HARAM VERSUS DEMOCRACY

Nigeria's most significant Islamist group, Boko Haram, is doing its utmost to derail the country's elections, which are now taking place. Recent days have seen the group carry out a series of horrific attacks throughout the country, complete with decapitations and arson. In particular, the attacks have targeted those participating in the voting in Nigeria's first election since the end of military rule in 1999. (Russia Today, March 28, 2015; Reuters, March 28, 2015)

KAZAKHSTAN'S FOREIGN FIGHTER PROBLEM...

In the four years since the start of the Syrian civil war, that conflict has become a focal point for foreign fighters from throughout the Muslim World. While the majority of those now fighting against the Assad regime have originated in the Middle East and Europe, Eurasia has also emerged as a significant staging ground for militancy. To wit, officials from Kazakhstan's National Security Committee now estimate that 150 of the country's citizens have traveled to the Middle East and taken up arms. This group, Kazakh officials say, has been accompanied by roughly 200 relatives (wives, children and dependents) who have also migrated to the Syrian battlefield. (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 20, 2015)

...AND A THREAT OF TERROR IN TAJIKISTAN

Nearby Tajikistan, meanwhile, is weathering an Islamist problem of a different sort. Militants who claim to be affiliated with the Islamic State have issued a new video threatening attacks in the Central Asian republic. The video, which was shared on the Russian social media site Odnoklasniki, features militants who claim to be moving their activities from the Middle East to the "post-Soviet space" as a first step in a campaign of terror in the region. In the taped message, the militants threaten that their next address will be issued "from the mountains of Tavildara in central Tajikistan, or the Tajik capital, Dushanbe - or even from the Kremlin." Tajik authorities have yet to comment on the posting. (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 23, 2015)

ISLAMIST FACTIONS UNITE IN SYRIA

Syria's disparate Islamist groups have become a bit more organized. In recent days, the Islamist group Ahrar al-Sham declared a merger with the smaller Suqur al-Sham in a move that positions the group as a stronger player in the Islamist factional jockeying taking place on the Syrian battlefield. Ahrar, the ranks of which are drawn significantly from local Syrians, is a competitor to both al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State. This factionalism, observers say, has helped keep the Islamist opposition to Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad divided - a state of affairs that the Syrian regime has exploited to date. (Reuters, March 22, 2015)

THE PIJ, RESURGENT

One of the Palestinian Authority's most significant Islamist groups is growing in strength and capability, Israeli officials have warned. According to assessments by the Israeli Defense Forces, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) - an Iranian-supported terrorist organization long localized to the Gaza Strip - is beginning to show signs of activity in the West Bank as well. (Jerusalem Post, March 23, 2015)