

ISIS a formidable adversary, to intensify global attacks: CIA

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Washington: Describing the Islamic State as a formidable adversary, CIA chief today made a candid admission that the US efforts to contain the dreaded terror group have not reduced its terrorism capability and global reach.

Testifying before a Senate Committee, the CIA Director John Brennan told lawmakers that despite all of the progress against IS on the battlefield and in the financial realm, the American efforts have not reduced the group's ability to launch terror attacks outside of its base in Iraq and Syria.

The resources needed for terrorism are very modest and the group would have to suffer even heavier losses on territory, man-power and money for its terrorist capacity to decline significantly, Brennan said.

With the increase in pressure, Brennan felt that IS will intensify its global terror campaign to maintain its dominance of the global terrorism agenda.

Since 2014, IS has been working to build an apparatus to direct and inspire attacks against its foreign enemies, resulting in hundreds of casualties.

The most prominent examples are the attacks in Paris and Brussels, which were directed by IS leadership, he added.

"We judge that IS is training and attempting to deploy operatives for further attacks. IS has large cadre of western fighters who could potentially serve as operatives for attacks in the west.

"And the group is probably exploring a variety of means for infiltrating operatives into the west, including in refugee flows, smuggling routes and legitimate methods of travel," Brennan warned.

"Furthermore, as we have seen in Orlando, San Bernardino and elsewhere, IS is attempting to inspire attacks by sympathisers who have no direct links to the group. Last month, for example, a senior IS figure publicly urged the group's followers to conduct attacks in their home countries if they were unable to travel to Syria and Iraq," he said.

Brennan told Senators that IS is gradually cultivating its global network of branches into a more interconnected global organisation.

The branch in Libya is probably the most developed and the most dangerous.

"We assess that it is trying to increase its influence in Africa and to plot attacks in the region and in Europe," he said. (Reopens FGN 25)

Meanwhile, IS's Sinai branch in Egypt has established itself as the most active and capable terrorist group in all of Egypt.

Other branches worldwide, while also a concern, have struggled to gain traction.

The Yemen branch, for instance, has been riven with factionalism, and the Afghanistan-Pakistan branch has struggled to maintain its cohesion in part because of competition with the Taliban, he said.

Brennan said on the propaganda front, the US-led international coalition is working to counter IS's expansive propaganda machine.

IS paints a crafted image to the outside world, lauding its own military efforts, portraying its so-called caliphate as a thriving state, and alleging that the group is expanding globally, even as it faces setbacks locally, he said.

IS, he noted, releases a multitude of media products on a variety of platforms, including social media, mobile applications, radio and hard copy mediums.

To disseminate its official online propaganda the group primarily uses Twitter, Telegram and Tumbler, and it relies on a global network of sympathisers to further spread its messages.

"In sum, IS remains a formidable adversary, but the United States and our global partners have succeeded in putting the group on the defensive, forcing it to devote more time and energy to try to hold territory and to protect its vital infrastructure inside of Syria and Iraq," he said.

- PTI