

War against IS should not be seen as West vs. Islam conflict — Millett

AMMAN — The war against the Islamic State (IS) should not be seen as a conflict between the West and Islam, but as a dispute within Islam between extremists and moderates, British Ambassador to Jordan Peter Millett said on Wednesday.

“I am worried that the fight against Daesh [IS] is seen as a fight between the West and Islam and as a new crusade. His Majesty King Abdullah himself has said that it is a dispute within Islam between extremists and moderates,” Millett stressed at a seminar at Al Rai Centre for Studies attended by researchers, opinion leaders and journalists.

Millet also noted that the major narrative on the war against IS should highlight that Arab countries believe that the terrorist group poses a threat and that the West is only providing support.

Responding to charges by an attendee that the UK and Western intelligence agencies are behind the creation of IS, Millett said: “There is no way that the UK is supporting IS. The radical group is not in any case a British product. There is much conspiracy theory in that but no truth whatsoever.”

The ambassador also explained that Muslims constitute 3 per cent of the British population and are fully assimilated within his country with no problems.

Noting that “99.9 per cent of British Muslims are good and moderate citizens who just want to get on with their lives,” Millett said. “Only a tiny minority who feel marginalised have been attracted to go to fight in Syria and Iraq. That poses a threat to us. We want to work with Jordan and other countries to address such a challenge.”

Agreeing with participants that poverty is not the source of radical ideology, Millett said that such deviant ideology is “either based on Takfirism or opposition to Shiites”.

“What is really worrying is that angry young men from the region who are looking for a place to enervate their anger are being attracted by the supposed salaries that Daesh is offering.”

Millet explained that UK citizens who go to fight in Syria and Iraq are not necessarily going for ideological reasons. He said young men, mainly of Pakistani, Yemeni and Somali origin, who do not feel entirely comfortable in the UK, go to the two war-hit countries because they see themselves fitting more there.

“The concept of the ‘Caliphate’ is very powerful... These people are not ideologically radicalised but they come back home ideologically recognised. This is the problem in the UK that we share with Jordan and other countries.”

Turning to the Palestinian-Israeli issue, Millett said the British position is exactly the same as Jordan, which advocates a solution to the decades-long conflict that is based on the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the pre-1967 borders on the basis of the two-state formula.

Millett also said that his country is seeking a UN Security Council resolution that institutionalises the Palestinian state, the refugee dilemma and the right of return, but Palestinian and Israeli peace negotiators should work out such a resolution.

Stressing the importance of the US role in resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Millett said London is not always in full agreement with Washington’s Mideast policy as is widely believed, citing an instance some three years ago, when Britain voted in favour of a Security Council resolution, condemning Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territory as illegal.

“The US vetoed that resolution,” he noted.

Millett added that the UK also has a clear position within the EU on considering Israeli settlement activities in the West Bank and Jerusalem as illegal. “The EU has taken steps on investments in the occupied territory. There is a movement in official and public opinion in Europe which recognises all settlements as illegal. This is a domain where the British policy is different from the US.”

Describing Jerusalem as a “hugely sensitive” issue, the ambassador said his colleague in Tel Aviv and British ministers have worked hard to reduce tension in the old city.

“We do not want to see any change to the long-held status quo in Jerusalem.”

During the seminar, Millett also voiced his country’s support of a comprehensive political solution to the ongoing war in Syria that should stipulate the departure of President Bashar Assad.

“Assad has to go. There is no way to deal with a regime that killed 200,000 of its people.”

Responding to a question on whether the UK would support a Turkish proposal to establish no-fly zones inside Syria, Millett said such a proposal has to go through the Security Council, where the Russians will turn it down.

“We tried three or four times to arrive at a decision in the Security Council on Syria, but the Russians have vetoed. The Turkish proposal of secure zones is something we are looking at but there are problems.”

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