



National Coordinator for Security and  
Counterterrorism  
*Ministry of Justice and Security*

# Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands 49

February 2019

## Terrorist Threat Assessment Netherlands

*Radicalisation - Extremism - Terrorism*

1

2

3

**4**

5

*Current threat level:*  
**Substantial**

The threat of a terrorist attack in the Netherlands is substantial, and the chance of an attack is real. This state of affairs is consistent with threat level 4. This is due to several, sometimes contradictory developments.



## 1. The threat of an attack<sup>1</sup>

Although the number of jihadist attacks in Europe had been falling continuously since October 2017, the threat situation in the Netherlands has been unsettled over the past year, due in part to attacks by lone actors (some of whom were inspired by jihadism) and the threat of a planned complex attack, which led to the arrest of seven people on 27 September 2018. There are still supporters of the jihadist movement who are involved in planning attacks in the Netherlands. To date this has not led to a concrete threat.

Even though the permanent loss of territory in Syria and Iraq has led to a lasting reduction to the threat of ISIS-directed attacks and no attacks have been committed in Europe by the al Qa'ida core since 2005, al Qa'ida networks in Syria are motivated and, in

theory, able to launch an attack in Europe, including in the Netherlands, at any time.

Third, as described in DTN48 the Dutch jihadist movement is currently undergoing a process of reorientation, and it is not yet clear what direction it will take. More recruitment activities are currently being carried out under the guise of *dawa*, but at the same time the movement continues to pose an ongoing violent threat, as the arrests of 27 September confirm.

This means that jihadism in the Netherlands is still a threat. The Dutch jihadist movement consists of more than 500 individuals as well as several thousand sympathisers. There are also approximately 135 Dutch jihadists in Syria. At this time the growth of the movement has all but stagnated. A limited number of minors and young adults are joining. These individuals were too young to leave the country during the wave of jihadist travel that began in 2012. At the same time, there are an unknown number of persons who join or sympathise with the jihadist movement for some time, but then lose interest.

The Dutch jihadist movement is currently still in a process of reorientation. It was noted in previous DTNs that Dutch jihadists were no longer willing or able to join ISIS or al Qa'ida in the Middle East and were

<sup>1</sup> The official name of the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands (DTN) has been changed to include the subtitle: Radicalisation – Extremism – Terrorism. There are various reasons for this change. First, the broad Dutch approach is premised on the idea that terrorism cannot be effectively tackled in isolation, but that the underlying radicalisation and extremism must also be addressed. Second, over the past few years the title of the report has regularly led to misunderstandings. Since the report also discusses cases of extremism and radicalisation, which may precede terrorism or acts of violence against human life, some readers have the impression that all individuals or organisations mentioned in the report can be linked to serious violence. Some individuals have used the fact that their opponents are mentioned in the report as a way to demonise them. The new subtitle has been added in an attempt to overcome these issues.

therefore focusing more on spreading these groups' ideas, with the intention of keeping the jihadist movement alive and recruiting new supporters. There are still concerns about the possibly violent intentions of Dutch jihadists. By their very nature jihadists are prepared to use violence, because they hold the belief that violence is legitimate or necessary in order to establish a 'caliphate'. This does not, however, mean that all the Dutch jihadists and jihadist sympathisers are actually engaging in violence or are in the process of preparing attacks.

The threat from outside the Netherlands also remains alive, particularly the threat of attack plans by al Qa'ida networks in Syria, who are motivated and able to commit an attack in Europe, including in the Netherlands, at any time.

As far as is known, the 27 September cell<sup>2</sup> was operating independently. Its members maintained contact with other jihadists both inside and outside the Netherlands, but they are not believed to have shared their plans or consulted with people outside the group. The members are thought to have been inspired by ISIS. Most of the members are part of the hard core of the Dutch jihadist movement. The arrests confirm that the Dutch jihadist movement poses a threat. An analysis of the movement reveals the existence of various stages. The 27 September cell is emblematic of the most recent stage. Previous stages include that of the Hofstad Group and their contemporaries (2000-2005) and that of jihadist travellers (2012-2017). In practice there are social ties between the various stages, and each stage builds on the ones that came before. The 27 September cell does however show that the jihadist struggle did not end with the fall of the 'caliphate'. In the Netherlands Dutch jihadists are continuing to wage jihad in various ways. There is another home-grown

element to the cell: most of its members have never gone to jihadist conflict zones, although some did attempt to do so and were subsequently convicted on related charges by a court.

Changes to the threat posed by jihadists coincide with developments in Salafist and right-wing extremist circles such as increased assertiveness and mutual provocation. The Salafist movement is gaining influence at a time of great opposition in right-wing populist and right-wing extremist circles to the supposedly growing influence of Islam on society. In recent years the anti-Islam debate on social media has become harsher and more widespread. Right-wing extremist circles in particular, in which the fight against Islam and jihadism are key mobilising and unifying factors, are seizing on Salafist ideas to legitimise their Islamophobic agenda. Salafist leaders in turn regularly point to Islamophobic narratives that treat Islam itself as a problem, in order to strengthen their own message. This dynamic is also contributing to current levels of social polarisation.

Due in part to increased polarisation, the terrorist threat posed by right-wing extremist lone actors is now greater than the threat of terrorist violence by larger right-wing extremist groups. Thus far, however, the upsurge in right-wing extremism in the Netherlands manifests itself less in violence and more in an increasingly aggressive and inflammatory online debate – directed in part at politicians and political office holders.

<sup>2</sup> Also called the Arnhem cell or Arnhem network.

### **Unstable threat situation may continue in the years ahead**

Various aspects of the current threat are uncertain and can suddenly develop in a negative direction. Both al Qa'ida and ISIS have the will to carry out attacks in Europe and to develop network structures that can carry out such attacks. In the countries surrounding the Netherlands, attacks are still occurring, and people involved in committing or preparing attacks have been arrested. International networks are continuing to develop, bringing Dutch and other European jihadists into contact with jihadists outside Europe. It should also be noted that there is an active jihadist movement of considerable size in the Netherlands, which is significantly larger than it was before the war in Syria. The bond between its members is strong, and they maintain contacts with jihadists in other countries. In the foreseeable future a number of convicted jihadists will be released from prison, which may create a new dynamic within the movement. Around 2010 it was concluded that the movement has lost most of its influence. At the time nobody imagined that jihadism in the Netherlands would grow as fast as it did and that eventually around 300 Dutch jihadists would travel to jihadist conflict zones. Previous long-term trends related to the terrorist threat have also shown that terrorist plans can in fact mature in periods of apparent calm. Considering all these aspects, it appears that the threat situation is likely to fluctuate over the next few years.

## **2. The terrorist threat to the Netherlands**

### **Thwarted attacks and arrests**

Dutch jihadists fear the increased attention of the authorities following the arrests of 27 September. This will probably result in a higher degree of security awareness, which could undermine the value of the person-specific approach.

It is worth noting that some members of the cell previously attempted to travel to Syria/Iraq but did not succeed. There are dozens of examples in Europe of would-be jihadist travellers who were stopped from leaving the country and who later committed terrorist violence in their own countries. Another similarity between Dutch and European jihadists is that some of the suspects are related to or in some other way connected with jihadist travellers who did succeed in reaching Syria or Iraq. The size of the cell is also notable. There has not been a home-grown terrorist cell of this size with plans for an ambitious attack in the Netherlands since 2006.

Four Syrians with refugee status and temporary asylum residence permits were recently suspected of membership of terrorist groups or involvement in a terrorist offence. Two of them have now been sentenced to four and nine years' imprisonment respectively. In the past, terrorist groups made use of refugee flows to send operatives to Europe, but as far as is known the four Syrians in question did not travel to the Netherlands with terrorist motives.

On 29 December four suspects were arrested in Rotterdam and one in Mainz (Germany) on suspicion of involvement in preparing a terrorist offence. Another suspect was arrested in Rotterdam on 31 December in a different criminal investigation on suspicion of involvement in a terrorist offence. Both investigations are still ongoing.

### **Recidivism seemingly rare among terrorists, but threat remains**

Research has shown that terrorists who have served their sentences are much less likely to reoffend than other types of criminals. However, the fact remains that three members of the 27 September cell had previously been under the supervision of the Dutch Probation Service – one of them was still under supervision at the time of the arrest – and despite this, they are again suspected of plotting a terrorist offence. But as far as is known there is no link between the time spent by several members of the 27 September cell in the terrorism wing of the Maximum Security Facility in Vught and their plans for an attack.

Despite the low level of recidivism, it does not follow that the threat posed by released prisoners has diminished or that the jihadist movement has become weaker. The fact that former prisoners are not suspected of committing a new criminal offence after their release does not mean that they have abandoned the ideology or their old networks/contacts (or any new ones they might have established in the terrorist wing). During their time in detention, convicted jihadists may have learned from their own criminal cases (and those of others), which may help them to stay below the radar of security agencies and law enforcement.

### **Jihadist travellers and returnees**

The main trends have not changed. Since June 2017 there have been no known new instances of an individual leaving the Netherlands and reaching a jihadist conflict zone. Jihadist travellers are returning to the Netherlands gradually.

### **Less ISIS propaganda but more radicalisation among young people**

The quantity and quality of ISIS propaganda being circulated in Dutch-speaking circles appears to be on the decline, but multiple Dutch-language Facebook pages remain active, and new

ones continue to be created, to share propaganda of a jihadist and anti-democratic nature. ISIS continues to spread propaganda, but less of it is being translated into Dutch or circulated in Dutch. This may in part be due to ISIS's military losses, but it is possible that the commitment and motivation of its supporters have also waned. Efforts by platforms like Facebook and Telegram to tackle propaganda have also played a role.

Recently concluded investigations in the Netherlands and Belgium describe a network that presented itself online in a highly extremist manner. What is striking about this group is that its members are quite young and adept at protecting their accounts and setting up networks where they post ISIS propaganda, which they produce or edit themselves. When confronted about the criminal offences they committed, they claimed not to be aware of the influence their posts could have.

### **Terrorist financing**

Various foundations in the Netherlands systematically initiate fundraising projects for those in need in the Netherlands and in conflict areas abroad. In some cases these foundations have close links to Salafist institutions in the Netherlands. There have occasionally been indications in open sources that the people behind these foundations embrace jihadist ideology. In other cases, the staff of such foundations are known to have been part of jihadist networks or the subjects of criminal investigations into terrorism. Around ten of these foundations are active in conflict areas controlled by jihadist groups. The foundations provide no information in open sources about the origins or allocation of the goods and donations collected. It is possible that the resources and funds collected by Dutch foundations are benefiting jihadist terrorist groups. It seems likely in any event that these resources and funds

are allocated in cooperation with or with the approval of such groups.

### **The Netherlands' international profile**

The announcement of a cartoon contest by Geert Wilders in the period covered by the previous DTN led to renewed attention to the Netherlands on the part of extremists and jihadists. The Netherlands remained on their radar after the contest was cancelled, as a result of the decision to give refuge to Asia Bibi's lawyer and due to utterances made by Geert Wilders, who circulated Mohammed cartoons during the Asia Bibi affair. This last act led to threats against the staff of the Dutch embassy in Pakistan. In Afghanistan the Taliban called for violence against Dutch military personnel in Afghanistan in response to the cartoon contest.

## **3. Terrorist threat to Europe**

### **Jihadist threat less visible, but still present**

The Global Terrorism Index published by the Institute for Economics and Peace concluded that the number of deaths caused by terrorism had fallen for the third year in a row (2015-2017) following a peak in 2014. This 'period of respite' still continues. Only six jihadist attacks were committed in Western European countries last year, in sharp contrast to the almost 20 attacks committed in 2017. As in 2017, most jihadist attacks that occurred in 2018 were not fatal and injured a handful of people at most. In the period under review only one attack in Europe can be said with some certainty to have been committed by a jihadist, namely the attack on the Christmas market in Strasbourg.

### **Jihadists in the West increasingly seeking to use chemical and biological toxins in attacks**

ISIS supporters in the West have shown increased interest in weaponising chemical and biological substances. This interest has already resulted in a successful attempt (in Germany) to make the poison ricin and an attempt (in Australia) to make the precursor chemicals of the poisonous gas hydrogen sulphide. In Italy a jihadist was arrested in November 2018 on suspicion of seeking to poison drinking water in Sardinia.

These developments are in part a product of the knowledge and expertise gained by ISIS in Syria and Iraq about chemical and biological means of attack. This knowledge is spread through propaganda that includes instructions for making and using chemical and biological toxins.

Nonetheless, the above-mentioned examples in the West do not necessarily suggest the existence of an effective threat, i.e. that the means of attack would have been suitable to be used in the intended way and cause a large number of deaths and injuries and widespread panic. For the time being at least, such attacks remain too complex (integrity of components, particle size, dissemination mechanism, etc.). Attacks or attempted attacks of this kind can, however, add a new psychological dimension to the threat. The economic damage can also be substantial. Clearing highly toxic substances or large quantities of toxins can cost a lot of time and money and can necessitate the protracted closure of the area in question. However, there are plenty of ways to successfully commit attacks without chemical or biological means. The above-mentioned interest in the use of chemical and biological weapons therefore does not mean that jihadists are now more inclined to commit attacks with chemical and biological toxins.

### **Documented vulnerability to drones may inspire jihadists to deploy them in the West**

Over the past few months the sighting of drones<sup>3</sup> at major airports in Europe has led to precautions that greatly impacted society, such as grounding air traffic for several days.<sup>4</sup> Although there are no indications that jihadists were behind these drones and no drone attacks have been carried out in Europe, the precautions taken clearly demonstrate how big the impact can be. They also show that it is hard for the authorities to ascertain the intentions of drone operators in short order – the same applies to truck drivers and operators of other dual-use goods – and that any possible countermeasures are insufficient to ensure that air traffic can proceed as normal under such circumstances.

Although little is known about any concrete intentions, incidents like these make it more conceivable that malicious parties, including jihadists, will use drones in the West to simulate a threat or to actually commit an attack. Concerns about this type of jihadist attack have been growing in recent years, because ISIS had acquired expertise in Syria and Iraq with modifying and building drones for use as weapons. These drones were able to drop small explosives (over walled or gated areas), while earlier models served as mobile booby traps.

### **Return of women and children remains a point of contention**

Internationally, there is mounting debate about the possible repatriation of minors while their parents remain in the region to be put on trial there. Various European countries are said to be making preparations for the return of jihadist travellers and their minor children. It should be noted that just because an individual EU member state

decides to change its policy to allow repatriation, this does not automatically mean that the Netherlands must do the same. Individual member states can make their own policy on this. Such a decision may, however, cause a public outcry. In early January the ombudsman urged the government for the second time to provide aid in the camps and to repatriate minor children where possible.

The jihadist women pose a real threat, having spent years in a jihadist conflict zone, often functioning as facilitators. Boys as young as nine can also pose a threat, particularly if they have been trained and have combat experience. Even women and minors who have not been trained and have not taken part in the violent conflict may pose a potential danger in the long term, due to their immersion in ISIS's violent ideology.

There are at least 170 minors in Syria with a link to the Netherlands. A small number of them are in camps in northeastern Syria. The humanitarian situation in these camps is generally poor. Online jihadist platforms highlight both the vulnerability of women and their militant role within the jihadist movement.

### **Changes to EU list of countries with weak money laundering and terrorist financing regimes**

The European Commission has added Saudi Arabia, Libya and several other countries to the list of third countries that pose a risk to Europe in terms of money laundering and terrorist financing. The Commission concluded that 23 countries had strategic deficiencies in their anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing frameworks. For these countries, the Commission assessed the existing legal framework and the controls put in place to prevent money laundering and terrorist financing risks and their effective implementation. As yet, no sanctions will be imposed. The countries in question will be given the

<sup>3</sup> Also known as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV).

<sup>4</sup> The suspension of all flights in and out of London Gatwick Airport around Christmas 2018 as a result of drones being flown in the area is an example of this.

opportunity to fill in the gaps in their regulatory frameworks. Banks are required to carry out extra checks on transactions involving account holders and financial institutions in these countries.<sup>5</sup>

### **Increase in right-wing extremist violence seems set to continue**

Although the data on right-wing extremist and right-wing terrorist violence in Europe prior to 2018 is ambiguous, the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV) has received clear signals over the past three years from partner organisations that right-wing extremist violence is becoming more serious and more common in various Western European countries and in North America. A study by the Institute for Economics and Peace came to the same conclusion. The number of deaths per year caused by violence committed by right-wing extremist groups and individuals grew from four to seventeen between 2014 and 2017. The increased popularity of right-wing populism and right-wing extremism in Europe and the United States translates into an increasing threat from right-wing terrorism and into a greater likelihood that right-wing terrorist violence will actually be committed. In France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain and other countries small groups and individuals have been arrested for preparing attacks. Targets include refugees, Muslims, left-wing opponents, prominent politicians and government organisations. Since the 1970s the violent threat has shifted from large right-wing terrorist movements to smaller cells and lone actors.

Three right-wing terrorist attacks in the United States in October and the

seemingly similar backgrounds of the three white male perpetrators led to a heated debate in America on whether the perpetrators were mobilised by the language used by President Donald Trump. Trump's discourse also resonates in right-wing extremist circles in Europe. This resonance among attackers (who embrace some combination of nationalism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, antisemitism and a belief in conspiracy theories) supports the view taken by politicians, researchers and (radical) left-wing opponents that Trump is partly responsible for these attacks. However, analyses by the FBI and other statistics on hate crime in the United States show that the rise in the number of hate crimes began before Trump was elected.

## **4. International developments**

### **ISIS determined to continue jihadist struggle**

ISIS lost its last patches of urban territory in Iraq and Syria in November 2017. Since then ISIS has been driven further back in both countries. In February 2019 ISIS lost its last pocket in Syria (Hajin) after months of fighting. This loss of territory in recent years does not alter the fact that ISIS is still to some extent able to operate freely in both Iraq and Syria. The group is determined to continue the fight in Syria and Iraq, as was also made clear in the recent audio message by its leader, al-Baghdadi. The predicted insurgency has also taken shape in the past year. The ISIS networks in Iraq in particular have become more active since spring 2018.

<sup>5</sup> The European Commission's proposal to amend the list of countries posing a risk to Europe in terms of money laundering and terrorist financing was a draft and was unanimously rejected by the Member States. The proposal to include, among others, Saudi Arabia and Libya will therefore not enter into force. For the current EU list see: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:02016R1675-20181022>

### **US withdrawal opens up opportunities for ISIS**

The short-term withdrawal of American troops from Syria, as announced by President Trump on 19 December 2018, would open up opportunities for ISIS. In the case of a withdrawal, military pressure on ISIS would ease considerably. This would give the terrorist group space to breathe and allow it to start trying to regain territory with renewed confidence.

### **Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham gains near full control over Idlib**

The province of Idlib, bordering on Turkey, is the last remaining stronghold in Syria of the armed Syrian Sunni opposition. The jihadist alliance Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) is the dominant armed group in this province. The Sochi agreement struck between Russia and Turkey in September 2018 has meant that a military offensive on Idlib by the Syrian army and its foreign allies could thus far be averted. The agreement provides for the creation of a 15- to 20-kilometre-wide demilitarised buffer zone in Idlib. It also stipulates that all heavy weapons must be removed from the zone and that 'radical groups' must withdraw from the area. The implementation of this agreement is proving very difficult. HTS has not withdrawn from the buffer zone, and after seizing power at the start of 2019, it now has near full control over Idlib. These developments may prompt the Syrian regime and Russia to launch an offensive against HTS after all. Such an offensive will affect the hundreds of Western jihadists currently in the province.

## **5. Extremism, radicalisation and polarisation**

### **Political Salafism as a threat to the democratic legal order**

The Salafist movement is discussed in the DTN for three reasons. First, the

central basic principles of the Salafist movement can lead to radicalisation and extremism, as well as isolation and alienation from the rest of society. Second, the existence of Salafist 'agitators' who preach intolerance and hatred online and offline can contribute to radicalisation and extremism. These preachers are therefore considered a potential threat to national security. There are dozens of Salafist 'agitators' in the Netherlands, many of whom have links to Salafist centres in their local area, but also preach all over the country. Most have them have a strong online presence. Third, some of these 'agitators' play a role in or have links with the Dutch jihadist movement, which they thereby help to sustain.

Salafist agitators propagate a theocratic message based around a strict and exclusive faith in the unity of Allah, absolute obedience to the laws given by Allah and the principle of loyalty and disavowal (*al-wala' wa-l-bara'*). This message fuels hate and intolerance towards those with different ideas or beliefs and encourages aversion to and rejection of institutions of democracy under the rule of law. This undermines the democratic legal order, both as a political system and as a way of living together as a society.

Political Salafists in particular are more and more actively teaching an anti-democratic interpretation of Salafist doctrines with the intention of reinforcing the 'Islamic identity' of young Muslims and ensuring that the day-to-day lives of Muslims in the Netherlands are guided by the Salafist version of Sharia law. In this way these political Salafists are striving for the creation of an autonomous community in which anti-democratic opinions and behaviour predominate. Within the Salafist movement, political Salafists are most actively seeking an alternative, replacement social structure that cannot be reconciled with the democratic legal order in the Netherlands.

### **The ambiguous relationship between Salafism and jihadism**

The Salafist movement's relationship to jihadism is multifaceted and ambiguous, and there are clear differences of opinion on the question of when the use of violence to overthrow governments is legitimate and who has to authority to call for this. The vast majority of Salafists reject the use of violence for achieving their ideals in the Netherlands and fiercely criticise jihadist groups such as al Qa'ida and ISIS.

Despite this, jihadists are often attracted to Salafist circles as a place to meet like-minded individuals. In these circles the interpretation of the doctrines at the basis of both Salafism and jihadism is the subject of ongoing discussion. It is highly probable that jihadist entrepreneurs try to influence the people and groups they meet in these circles, in terms of ideology and in other ways. Experience has shown that their activities in these circles can serve to attract new recruits to the movement. Over the next few years released jihadist prisoners and 'returnees' are expected to reintegrate into Dutch society and to move in Salafist circles in a similar manner.

Some authoritative 'agitators' who are frequently active at Salafist centres as preachers or teachers condone certain forms of jihadist violence. A number of them are also active on the jihadist scene. In their sermons and lectures they tend to give no indication that they are affiliated with jihadism or jihadist terrorist groups such as ISIS, but their activities at these centres help foster an environment in which jihadist ideas are voiced unchallenged and grow to become widely accepted. To outsiders the distinction between these various kinds of 'agitators' is not immediately clear.

### **Influence of Salafist movement in the Netherlands continues to grow**

The size and influence of the Salafist movement has grown sharply since the 2000s, and this growth continues steadily – including in Turkish-Dutch communities. Salafist leaders and 'agitators' regularly launch new educational initiatives. This is part of the reason they dominate non-formal Islamic education in the Netherlands. They raise funds in the Netherlands and abroad to finance these new projects. Salafist leaders are also gaining influence in existing Islamic institutions, and Salafists are establishing contacts with local authorities. They regularly profess to be peaceful and tolerant, a position which is utterly at odds with the ideas they disseminate within their own circles about those with different ideas and about Dutch society in general.

The number of institutes devoted to non-formal education on Islamic law has almost doubled over the past two years. It is notable that the focus of these institutes' curricula is shifting from dogma and rituals to Sharia law and 'Islamic financing'. These institutes focus on training Muslim experts and providing strategic tips for political activism, with a view to promoting *tamkeen* (empowerment and the reinforcement of organisational bases and structures).

Political Salafists consider 'empowerment' necessary for Muslims in light of their 'oppression and persecution' by non-believers. They believe that this is why Muslims must endure what they regard as 'ordeals' and must consequently organise political resistance and possibly seek to establish a powerful Salafist pillar that can stand up to the immorality of society, 'anti-Islam forces' and oppression. The same trends appear to exist in surrounding countries in Europe. The teaching of Islamic law in political Salafist and radical circles may build support for the implementation of

certain aspects of Sharia law in the Netherlands. The aim of training experts is to prepare young Muslims for leadership, enabling them to take on key positions in Dutch society in the future.

Over the past 30 years a significant number of young Muslims from the Netherlands have studied at the Islamic University of Madinah. Their number appears to have grown in recent years. A recent French study found that as of 2018, 111 students from the Netherlands had graduated from the university. The curriculum of the Islamic University of Madinah is aimed exclusively at imparting Salafist teachings. The Saudi government provides for students' accommodation and cost of living. Thanks in part to this programme, large numbers of Salafist preachers are on hand to spread the Salafist ideology and strengthen Salafist organisations in the Netherlands. This has contributed to the dominance of Salafism in Dutch-language information and material on Islam, whether in books, online or through Islamic youth organisations and non-formal education. This dominance is not conducive to the success of other initiatives aimed at training imams in the Netherlands.

#### **Cooperation between Turkish-Dutch organisations and radical Turkish groups**

Some Turkish-Dutch organisations maintain online and offline ties with radical Islamic organisations in Turkey. Young Dutch people have participated in jointly organised youth camps in Turkey. These Turkish-Dutch organisations' Facebook pages refer to murdered jihadists as 'martyrs' and post anti-Western and antisemitic messages. The concern is that these ties may bring young Turkish-Dutch people into contact with radical Islam, increasing the chance that they will distance themselves from Western norms and values and reject Western democracy.

#### **Left-wing extremism**

In the period under review there have been many protests about environmental issues. In many cases the protests took the form of lawful activism, but there was some unlawful protest as well. Protesters work together at international level. A tried-and-tested modus operandi used by left-wing extremists is to threaten the suppliers of a particular targeted company in order to prevent that company from engaging in daily operations.

Left-wing extremist and far-left organisations involved in combating (perceived) racism and fascism have become more active. Whereas several years ago they mainly chose to ignore demonstrations by far right groups, in the last 18 months they have held counter demonstrations at every far-right demonstration of any significance. As a result confrontations have hardened. The left has long been using violence against the right and deliberately sought out confrontation. The far right's increased confidence means they too are more willing to engage in confrontation. Nevertheless, left-wing extremists do not yet seem to have a clear strategy for responding to new manifestations of right-wing extremism. It is conceivable that left-wing extremists will make themselves heard more often in the months ahead, in opposition to the resurgence of right-wing extremism.

#### **Animal rights extremism**

The trends regarding animal rights extremism remain unchanged. In other words, most protests take the form of lawful activism (holding demonstrations, influencing consumers and posting messages on social media); there are only a small number of extremist protest actions, such as covert filming of (perceived) animal abuse at farms and the issuing of threats.

Habitat management in the Oostvaardersplassen nature reserve continues to cause unrest. In the period

under review most protests were in opposition to the proposed culling of the excess animal population. Threats have been made. Thus far, there are no indications that known extremist animal rights protest groups or individuals were the driving force behind these protests. The protests seem to be the work of a heterogeneous group of 'angry citizens', local protest groups and protesters without an extremist ideological background.

### **Right-wing extremism**

The right-wing extremist movement in Europe has two faces. On the one hand, the movement is characterised by fragmentation, weak leadership, personal animosity and the absence of a consistent organisational structure. On the other hand, small professional cells and lone actors are committing serious violence in various European countries with ever greater frequency.

On at least eight occasions over the past three years, politicians in various European countries have been the specific target of violence with a terrorist motive or of thwarted plans to commit such violence. The cases in the past three years show that the threat of person-specific violence against national politicians can be traced to various sources: right-wing extremists (four cases), left-wing extremists (two cases) and jihadists (two cases), and that violence can be committed or planned by both lone actors and groups.

Dutch right-wing extremists do not play a leading role in Europe. Recent studies by the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) and the NCTV about the right-wing extremist scene in the Netherlands and the rest of Europe paint a picture of a movement where there is considerable online and offline activity outside the usual organisations. In this context the fluidity of connections is especially striking.

When it comes to right-wing terrorist violence in the Netherlands, the threat

posed by lone actors is now greater than that posed by larger groups. One man was found guilty of preparing and promoting murder with terrorist intent and of unlawful possession of a firearm and munition with the same intent. The man's targets were Muslims and prominent left-wing figures. He was sentenced to 36 months' imprisonment. The AIVD and the NCTV warn of the impact that the polarised social debate could have on lone actors.

The upturn in right-wing extremism in the Netherlands is, thus far, manifesting itself primarily in the use of increasingly aggressive and inflammatory language on the internet rather than in violence. This new confidence is also reflected in the fact that the right is openly seeking confrontation with left-wing opponents in cities where the left is especially active, such as Amsterdam and Nijmegen. Besides this, small right-wing extremist groups focus mainly on intimidating and radical protect actions, which cause unrest in Muslim communities.

Since the rise of Donald Trump, the alt-right movement has acquired a receptive audience in various European countries including the Netherlands. Online, the Dutch alt-right scene has a strong focus on international developments and on the United States in particular.

### **Polarisation on the issue of 'Black Pete' broadens**

The 'Black Pete' debate has been ongoing for many years, but since 2014 the tone has become more heated, with the discussion coming to encompass various facets of identity politics. The labelling of the St Nicholas celebrations as racist by opponents of 'Black Pete' has met with both support and resistance in Dutch society. Thus far, there is no concrete evidence that the threat of violence is growing, but this is conceivable. A complicating factor for the government is that the threat of violence is not only posed by known groups, but that 'angry citizens' may

mount unlawful protests at their own initiative. Widespread polarisation also entails the risk that incidents could escalate, possibly leading to unlawful actions. Another risk of polarisation is that it can undermine some people's confidence in government. As yet, there is no widely supported compromise in sight on how to celebrate St Nicholas Day, making it likely that the debate will continue to present security issues for some years to come.

---

### **About the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands**

The Netherlands uses a system of threat levels that indicate the likelihood of a terrorist attack. The National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV) publishes the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands (DTN) three times a year. The DTN presents a broad outline of the threat to the Netherlands posed by domestic and international terrorism. The DTN is based on information from the intelligence and security services, the police, public sources and foreign partners, and on analyses by embassy staff.

**Publisher**

National Coordinator for Security  
and Counterterrorism

Postbox 20301, 2500 EH Den Haag  
Turfmarkt 147, 2511 DP Den Haag  
070 751 5050

[www.nctv.nl](http://www.nctv.nl)  
[info@nctv.minvenj.nl](mailto:info@nctv.minvenj.nl)  
[@nctv\\_nl](https://twitter.com/nctv_nl)

February 2019