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Session 2005-2006

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**Counterterrorism**

**No. 66**

**LETTER FROM THE MINISTERS OF JUSTICE AND OF  
INTERNAL AFFAIRS AND KINGDOM RELATIONS**

To the President of the House of Representatives of the States General

The Hague, 2 March 2006

We hereby submit to you a summary of the National Terrorist Threat Assessment (DTN) of February 2006. The DTN is prepared four times each year by the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and is intended in the first instance for the National Security Council. The DTN is also discussed with the House's Committee for the Intelligence and Security Services. Twice each year, a summary of the DTN is included in the half-yearly progress report on counterterrorism. Since the progress report that follows will not be sent to your House until the summer of this year, we have opted to inform your House on the contents of the most recent DTN in this way. The next progress report will include a summary of the current DTN and will also look into the potential policy implications of the DTN.

The Minister of Justice,  
J. P. H. Donner

The Minister of Internal of Affairs and Kingdom Relations,  
J. W. Remkes

## **National Terrorist Threat Assessment, February 2006**

### *General*

The terrorist threat to the Netherlands remains substantial. What this means is that there is a real chance of an attack taking place in the Netherlands. It also means that we have to consider the possibility that such an attack might take the form of a suicide attack. Fortunately, various arrests made in the past in connection with terrorist activities have been able to either remove or at least temporarily reduce an acute threat. These arrests have not, however, led to a permanent reduction of the general threat level. This is because the threat to the Netherlands is much more complex and comprehensive than the threat involved in some of the actual recent cases. The security services in the Netherlands are investigating a range of terrorist networks. The Hofstad group is a high-profile example of one of these networks. Public interest in the activities of members of this specific network is understandable, but this must not lead to a situation where the danger from other networks is either overlooked or underestimated. In addition, new individuals and connections are regularly coming to the attention of officers engaged in counter-terrorist activities.

The current significant threat level has its basis in a range of domestic and foreign factors. What follows is a summary of the most important elements that are notable in relation to these threat assessments, and which have an influence on the current general level of the threat.

### **Developments in the Netherlands**

In the Netherlands, a significant threat is seen as emanating from domestic terrorist networks.. In addition, there is an unabated continuation of radicalisation processes within an element of the total Muslim population and a number of converts in the Netherlands. This involves an ever-increasing involvement on the part of women in violent conflict, both at national and international levels. This is apparent from their activities within the terrorist networks on the domestic front and their involvement in suicide attacks abroad. It is noticeable that the active participation by women in the jihad battle is being provided with religious legitimacy by influential radical Islamic ideologues, on an increasingly explicit basis.

Here in the Netherlands at the start of 2006, it is apparent that, as in past years, recruitment for the jihad is taking place both at home and abroad. In addition to the facilitative function of the Internet for a type of self-recruitment, the classic recruitment process still continues, with a recruiter playing a key role. The Internet itself contains a wealth of training material of a jihadist nature, which is also readily accessible. In many cases this training material is of professional quality. With the disappearance of the bulk of the physical training camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan, many jihadists have now been redirected to these virtual training facilities on the Internet. The straightforward accessibility of detailed and professionally set out training material poses a significant risk.

A shift of emphasis can be perceived in recent times within the ideology of an important group of followers of radical Islam.. The classical, violent takfir ideology, as originally developed in Egypt, appears to have acquired a range of variants in the Western context. The classic ideology is characterised - within the limits of its own intolerant perceptions - by a relatively high level of freedom in relation to the traditional interpretation of the Koran and the choice of one's own spiritual leader. This individualist aspect of the takfir ideology appears to be well-suited to young Muslims on the path to radicalisation in Europe, and may explain some of the ideology's popularity in the Netherlands. The classical takfir doctrine is no longer adopted as a whole. The mutant takfir ideology can best be described as 'neo-takfir ideology'. One of the recent tendencies identified within neo-takfir circles in the Netherlands is that they are no longer required to distance themselves from, or turn against, their immediate environment. This in turn makes the new variant more straightforwardly accessible in nature, with a clear potential for growth. The supporters now include a fast-growing group of radical youngsters.

These negative developments are balanced to some extent by the promising discovery that resistance to radicalisation and violence in the name of Islam is on the increase among Muslim communities in the Netherlands. Moderate and liberal Muslims, as well as more orthodox believers, are gradually becoming more insistently involved in the social debate, and distancing themselves publicly from violent Islamic factions. Discussion of terrorism is also being raised on the agenda within the Islamic world. The media in particular appears to have an important part to play here. Arabic television broadcasters, for example, broadcast television series during the recent month of Ramadan, expatiating on the dangers of a violent interpretation of Islam. This is a sensitive topic in the Arabic world, because many Muslims generally view the violent jihad as being a response to alleged aggression on the part of the United States and its allies.

On the other hand, the international uproar surrounding the Danish cartoons published in recent months clearly shows that radical Muslims outside the Netherlands will not miss any opportunity to go on record expressing their anti-western message, accompanied by violence if needs be. In case of the cartoons, it appears that a democratic nation with freedom of personal expression and freedom of the press, can find itself backed into a corner if opinions unfavourable to Muslims are published in the media or elsewhere. In such a case, the rage is directed against an entire country and its population. All of this implies that the sometimes fierce public debate on Islam in the Netherlands involves a risk that our country too could become the target of radical-Islamic agitation at any moment.

Another factor of importance to future threat assessments for the Netherlands is the increasing number of radical Muslims being arrested. There is a major likelihood that some of these detainees might at the very least continue to provide an ideological and strategic contribution to the development of their spiritual brethren. Experience in other countries confirms that leaders of terrorist groups frequently use their years of detention to pursue their personal

ideological and political development. Many of the publications issued by today's influential ideologues from the heart of Al Qaeda were written in prison. The threat posed by detained radical Muslims no longer proceeds merely from the possibility of influencing others inside the prison environment. The prospect of long-term detention of radical Muslims raises a threat with ramifications for the ideological and strategic debate undertaken by the dependants of radical Islam.

Polarisation and tensions within society continue, more than a year after the murder of Van Gogh, although at the same time there is an appreciation that people have to get on with each other. Segregation as a distancing process between population groups in Dutch society seems, by contrast, to be on the increase. The threat might in the fullness of time be adversely influenced not only by confrontations between population groups, but also by a divide in Dutch society nurtured on uncertainty or antipathy. While not amounting to race riots, the gravity of the recent disturbances in France should provide us with a warning against underestimating or ignoring risk-laden processes occurring within distinct groups, or when groups separate from each other.

### **International developments**

From an international perspective, the Netherlands also remains a potential terrorist target for the future. How potential terrorists in other countries view the Netherlands is of crucial significance here. Such views might conflict with obvious facts, or a generally or even broadly held impression of the Netherlands. This is partly manifested by the fact that the Netherlands is regularly mentioned in statements made by jihadist ideologues who have to be taken seriously. One recent example is a fatwa issued by Abu Musab al-Suri, one of the most important Al Qaeda ideologues, which appeared on a number of Islamist websites. We cannot for the time being confirm the authenticity of this fatwa, quoted on the Internet, but the threat has in the meantime been disseminated across radical websites and is being taken seriously by the security services.

In addition to declarations of intent on the part of terrorists, there are also actual developments aimed at increasing the potential impact of terrorists. We are aware of plans in North Africa to set up a jihadist organisation. These plans include arranging for links to be formed between the Algerian group *Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat* (GSPC) and other jihadist movements and movements associated with Al Qaeda. The apparent ambition held by jihadists to set up a new umbrella jihadist organisation in North Africa may involve a threat for a Europe that should not be ignored. A number of North African jihadist networks have already built up contacts in Europe. The presence of large groups of Algerian and Moroccan immigrants in many Western European countries might afford operational benefits to any such new organisation, which will probably be characterised by being highly network-based. There might also be an influence on radicalisation processes. The conflict in the battle arena of Iraq also continues to exercise its allure on jihadists throughout the entire world. We have long been concerned about the possible arrival of jihadists in Europe who have drawn experience from the

conflict in Iraq. Such a threat should not be ignored, in the light of the consequences of the arrival in Europe of jihadists from Afghanistan in the 1990s.

## **Conclusion**

To summarise matters, we may conclude that it is unlikely that there are any foreseeable prospects of a reduction in the substantial threat to the Netherlands, or indeed to many of the European Union member states and our allies within NATO.