
Session 2006-2007

29 754

Counterterrorism

No. 87

**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, 13 October 2006

We hereby submit to you a summary of the National Terrorist Threat Assessment (DTN) of September 2006. The DTN is prepared four times each year by the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism (NCTb) 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 December 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

SUMMARY OF NATIONAL TERRORISM THREAT ASSESSMENT FOR SEPTEMBER 2006

Threat level

The terrorist threat to the Netherlands remains substantial. Consideration of the national and international dimension of the threat, contrasted with resistance to it, leads to this conclusion on the basis of the information provided by the NCTb in relation to the threat. What this means is that the chance of an attack in the Netherlands remains a real one. This assessment is the result of a number of diverse developments.

The combination of some elements of the threat assessment suggests a reduction of the threat in relation to all earlier threat assessments. An important factor in this context is that no *concrete* threat has emanated from known terrorist networks in the Netherlands in the recent past. In addition, at the moment there are hardly any jihadists coming to Europe from Iraq, and we have not been able to establish any noticeable interest in the Netherlands on the part of international jihadist networks. The reduction in the threat against the Netherlands was also a result of the continuation of the trend, established in the previous threat assessment, of local networks tending to develop an international agenda.

By contrast, however, there are also some elements tending to increase the threat assessment in general terms. Thus, the threat against other European countries, transatlantic allies and the West in general remains substantial. The unpredictable and dynamic nature of this significant trans-national dimension of the threat also affects the Netherlands, which remains a potential terrorist target simply because it is a Western country. We have also taken into account that small groups of radical Muslims are particularly volatile. On this basis, we must certainly bear in mind the possibility of spontaneous outburst by individuals and groups. Against this background, the continually increasing radicalisation among Muslims in the Netherlands, prompted or strengthened by international developments, continues to provide cause for concern. We must point out here that the continuing radicalisation processes have not as yet led to a strengthening of the potential power of terrorist networks.

Terrorism

National threat

As regards the national dimension of the threat, there was no concrete threat in the period under review emanating from the known terrorist networks. On the other hand, small groups of radical Muslims are particularly volatile, which could result in spontaneous violent outbursts by individuals and groups. The failed attacks against the railway system in Germany illustrate the risks of small networks, set up spontaneously and speedily proceeding with action. The escalation of conflicts such as that in the Middle East may filter through to

local networks. Despite the recent escalation of these conflicts, there are not at present any indications of a concomitant impact on the Dutch situation.

International threat and impact on the Netherlands

The threat is determined, to a significant extent, by potential repercussions for the Netherlands from foreign developments. Recent developments in the United Kingdom have an important part to play here. The British authorities appear to have broken up a terrorist plot which might very well have eclipsed the attacks of the 11 September 2001. The case has an influence on the terrorist threat against the West in general terms, because a threat against international civilian aviation is by definition a cross-border threat. As matters stand, however, no links have been found between this case and the Netherlands.

The situation in Iraq also continues to exercise a significant influence on the international jihadist agenda. Despite the Al Qaeda leader in Iraq, Al-Zarqawi, having been deposed, the conflict in Iraq - which is partly jihadist in nature - continues unabated and has now descended to the level of a civil war in some areas. The impact of this on terrorist networks active in the Netherlands appears however to be limited, at least as regards concrete activities. There are no current indications of a threat against the Netherlands. The same applies in relation to the threat from Iraqi jihadists. The risk of Iraqi jihadists with battle experience in an urban environment travelling to Europe and the Netherlands is probably as great as ever, but there are no indications at this point of any such influx to the Netherlands. The conflict in Iraq does, however, remain a motivating factor in ideological terms.

The tensions between Israel and Hezbollah/Lebanon have also provided a revived source of inspiration for the supporters of radical Islam in recent times. While the security services cannot rule out foreign attacks by Hezbollah, there are no indications of any such threat against the Netherlands. The recent ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah has also resulted, at the very least, in a temporary de-escalation of the conflict. The failed attacks against the railway network in Germany should probably also be viewed against the background of the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, and demonstrate that the international situation can also promote the birth of spontaneous networks and indulgence in terrorist activities, even far from the heat of battle.

The ever worsening security situation in Afghanistan also requires a mention. It is not just that the border areas are now increasingly coming under Taliban influence, but there are also large-scale territorial battles in Afghanistan itself. The presence of Dutch peace-keeping forces in Afghanistan means that the Netherlands is directly involved in the local conflict, and may also have an impact on the perceptions of supporters of radical Islam. However there are no indications at present of any likely expansion of the role of the Netherlands within the international peacekeeping community, which presently comprises 22 countries.

Another factor of relevance to the threat assessment is the possible impact on Europe of developments in North Africa. The revival of jihadist activities, primarily by domestic networks based there, appears to be developing into a trans-Mediterranean association with these networks. This concentration of power is not only focused on the war in Iraq but also has an impact on the jihadist networks in Europe. No immediate threat to the Netherlands has yet been established as a result of this concentration of power.

Finally, the foiled suspected attacks in the United Kingdom on aircraft bound for the United States highlight the risk of assuming that the core of Al Qaeda is now virtually insignificant when considering the threat to the West. Despite all of the debates and investigations, there are at present no convincing and definitive assessments of the power at the core of Al Qaeda.

Non-jihadist threat

The arrest of 17 extreme right-wing potential terrorists in Belgium shows that an escalation of political violence from non-jihadist directions has to be regarded as a serious risk. There had been contact between the Belgian suspects and Dutch extremists. An investigation is ongoing into the nature and extent of these contacts.

Radicalisation

The persistence of radicalisation within an element of Muslim youths in the Netherlands is a worrying development, which also continues to exercise an influence on the longer-term threat. There are various factors of significance to the present threat assessment. First of all it has become apparent that, when Dutch residents pursue religious studies abroad, it is often associated with radicalisation. The increasing number of Dutch students in Saudi Arabia gives cause for concern in this regard.

The gullibility of vulnerable population groups also has a part to play. It is, for instance, noticeable that more and more teenagers (16 and 17 year olds) are getting involved on the fringes of jihadist networks. This illustrates how receptive young people are to radicalisation. Investigation of jihadist networks and monitoring the Internet also show that the part played by women in boosting the religious radicalisation process within these networks is on the increase.

It is also noticeable that increasingly large numbers of radical Dutch youths of Turkish origin are turning towards Jihadism. Whereas it used to be the case that individuals with a Turkish background cropped up occasionally in local jihadist networks, primarily those of a North African nature, the position now seems to be that small groups of youths are turning en masse towards Jihadism. These youths appear to be identifying increasingly with the Islamic community, which has started to take the place of their Turkish national identity. Frustration at the position of Muslims in the Netherlands and anger at events in areas of conflict nurture the feeling of "having to do something". Apart from these developments within the Turkish community, we should also confirm that the expansion of non-violent Salafism - highlighted in earlier

threat assessments - which forms a springboard towards further radicalisation in the direction of Jihadism for some young people, is continuing in many mosques.

As regards the Internet in its function as a catalyst, we would finally mention that some popular and neutral websites are also being used covertly as platforms for radical Islam.

Polarisation

As before, there continues to be concern regarding polarisation. In addition to the anti-integration and isolationist message of some Salafis, this phenomenon is also fed to a significant extent by extreme right-wing pronouncements. There were various cases of inter-ethnic violence in the period under review. In more than half of these cases, extreme right-wing violence was perpetrated by so-called Lonsdale youths, skinheads and the National Alliance. The manifestation of inter-ethnic violence undermines the cohesion of Dutch society.

Resistance

Looking at the issue of resistance, it appears that resistance by Muslims continues to be on the increase. Some Dutch mosques actively oppose radicalisation. There are also more and more signs of increasing resistance at an intellectual level, apparent for example in the manifesto of the European Muslim Network, which argues for a European and democratic identity for Muslims. Voices are also being heard from the Moroccan community (which is susceptible to Jihadism) which view a strengthening of the Berber identity as an answer to the allure of radical Islam.