

Justitie



## National Coordinator for Counterterrorism



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reference when replying.  
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topic per letter.

We now submit a summary of the National Terrorist Threat Assessment (DTN) for March 2007. 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 Intelligence and Security Services Committee. Twice each year, a summary of the DTN is incorporated into the semi-annual counterterrorism progress report. As the next progress report will not be submitted to your House until the end of May, we have opted to inform your House about the contents of the most recent DTN in this manner. The next progress report will include a summary of the current DTN and will also explore any potential policy implications arising from the DTN.

The Minister of Justice

The Minister of Internal  
Affairs and Kingdom  
Relations,

### National Terrorist Threat Assessment, March 2007

The most significant feature of the newest Threat Assessment is the conclusion that the threat level can now be adjusted downwards, from “substantial” to “limited”. The ‘limited’ level means that the chance of a terrorist attack is relatively slight, but can certainly not be ruled out entirely.

There was a concrete<sup>1</sup> terrorist threat against the Netherlands at the time of the arrest of Samir A. and the murder of Theo Van Gogh in 2004. This was also underscored by subsequent arrests of local network members. Along with this concrete threat, there was a significant potential threat<sup>2</sup>, arising for example from the attacks in Madrid in March 2004. The international profile of the Netherlands and, in particular, the presence of Dutch troops in Iraq and subsequently in Afghanistan also had a part to play in this potential threat. Other significant elements of the Threat Assessment included the radicalisation of young Muslims, the polarisation in Dutch society with its potential nurturing effect on radicalisation, the possible return of jihadists from Iraq to Europe and the possible resurgence of the core of Al Qaeda. Finally, some additional factors contributing towards uncertainty were based on more recent incidents in Europe and Canada, which had made it clear that many occurrences throughout the world can be experienced by young jihadists as key events, that they are pragmatic in their selection of targets and that the formation of networks can occur extremely quickly. The Internet is a facilitating resource in all of these facets.

The previous Threat Assessments each time weighed up this mix of information and the balance at those moments still tended towards the “substantial” threat level. Within the ambit of the

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<sup>1</sup> **Concrete** threat (or *known* threat): a threat identified by the security authorities at the level of networks and/or individuals.

<sup>2</sup> **Potential** threat (or *predictable* threat): following the experience of 11 September 2001, the manifestation of a threat that cannot be excluded, although the security authorities have no concrete indicators available.

"substantial" threat level, there had, over the course of time, been shifts in the "weight" attributed to the factors. Since the Threat Assessments of October 2006, there appeared to have been a continuing reduction in the concrete threat in the Netherlands. This resulted in a shift in the centre of gravity in the assessment of the threat towards the potential threat arising from ongoing radicalisation in the Netherlands, the international context and also the international profile of the Netherlands. In addition to the reduction of the concrete domestic threat, which is assumed to be of a long-term nature, the potential threats did not materialise. One of the relevant factors was an increased resilience within the Muslim community.

This trend has now finally led to the reduction of the threat level to "limited". The most significant of the associated risks are now in the area of the unpredictability of incidental acts of violence, the long-term risks of radicalisation, which still continues, and the potential of the Netherlands having an enhanced international profile.

The "limited" threat level is a general indication of the threat level for the Netherlands. The reduction of the threat level has no immediate consequences for actual security measures, nor can it. Other systematology is applied in order to determine these measures, namely the Counterterrorism Alert System and the Protection and Surveillance System.

The following are the most important elements of the current Threat Assessment.

#### National

The situation surrounding the known jihadist networks in the Netherlands can once again be described as reasonably calm. A phenomenon that was described in cautious terms in October 2006 appears to be a trend. Some of these networks have collapsed, either as a result of government intervention or of lack of leadership and internal schism, while those networks that continue in existence display a wide gap between the jihadist ideal and practical reality.

It may also be assumed that government interventions, culminating in convictions, inclusion in the EU terrorism list and

- most of all - expulsions, are having a deterrent effect and a curbing influence on new growth.

We have also noted that individuals who commit violence (or threaten to do so) associate their actions with a radicalised view of faith and society, either explicitly or implicitly. Some of them, however, do this not so much from religious conviction but as an act of frustration or because of a lapse into a state of psychological confusion. By referring to their Islamic backgrounds, they appear to be legitimising their actions to themselves and their peers.

#### Radicalisation

The influence of Salafist philosophy - which forms a stepping stone towards radicalisation and potential development towards readiness for violence for some individuals - increased significantly during 2005 and 2006. The most important Salafist centres in the Netherlands play a major part in the dissemination of his philosophy. They are active in their attempts to influence mosques in other parts of the country in ideological terms, and sometimes even to take over moderate mosques. What is noticeable here is that Salafists tend to make more use of "language" as an instrument to spread Salafism. It was reported in 2006 that Salafis were using Dutch to draw in Muslim youths, who frequently had no mastery of Arabic. Evidently this strategy is now being applied in order to put over the Salafist message to other target groups (in Turkish and to those who speak Berber).

Apart from the spread of Salafism, there is also a lively youth and Internet culture, notable primarily for the polemic between sympathisers of the violent and non-violent jihad. Sympathisers of the violent jihad use the Internet to glorify and legitimise the jihad battle and martyrdom across a range of topics.

The fact that orthodox and even extremist variants of Islam are becoming matters of transient fashion means that these variants are susceptible to being 'dumbed down', and may even eventually go out of fashion. On the other hand, this youth subculture can make radical Islam and its ideas more accessible to young people.

However, neither the expansion of Salafism nor this youth subculture appear at the moment to be leading towards anything

more than incidental radicalisation aimed at a readiness to perpetrate violence. This conclusion is supported by the weakening of the concrete terrorist threat in the Netherlands.

### International

North Africa plays an important part in the international threat assessment, with potential ramifications for Europe and therefore, to a certain extent, for the Netherlands. Thus the Spanish enclaves in Ceuta and Melilla in Morocco appear to have turned into significant sources of mobilisation for the jihadist movement. Zawahiri referred to the Spanish enclaves as "occupied Islamic territory". Following the official acknowledgement of the absorption of the Algerian terrorist '*Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat*' (GSPC) within Al Qaeda, it was confirmed at the end of January that the GSPC would henceforth call itself the "Al Qaeda Organisation in the Islamic Maghreb". The organisation is targeting "apostate regimes" in North Africa and the "crusaders" in Europe and the USA. The organisation will certainly have an extra motivation, following its formal association with Al Qaeda and the change of name, to commit some act and show that it can also play a significant part in the international jihad. The assessment also shows that North African networks, such as the GSPC, are principally confining their operational activities to their own territories, for reasons of pragmatism: after all, regional attacks generally require less preparation than trans-national ones.

If these types of networks actually show their hand in Europe by means of attacks, we anticipate that they are more likely to be active in, for example, Spain or France rather than in the Netherlands.

It is now possible to see signs of a potential resurgence of the power of Al Qaeda in Pakistan. The Al Qaeda threat towards Europe appears to be confined to the United Kingdom because of the makeup of the population there. There is little in the way of concrete evidence to support the assertion that the remnants of Al Qaeda pose an immediate and concrete threat to the Netherlands. All things considered, it is most likely that the threat from Al Qaeda towards the European mainland will come via the North African networks.

One potential disruption to the current Threat Assessment arises from a possible negative change in the international profile of the Netherlands. The occurrence of such a change might be influenced by negative developments connected with the Dutch contribution in Afghanistan. On the other hand, previous threat assessments have paid appropriate attention to the lessons learned from the United Kingdom, Germany and Denmark: the many key events, speedy radicalisation and formation of networks, pragmatic selection of targets and actions based on emotion. While there are no signs yet in relation to the Dutch situation, we cannot exclude the possibility that networks or individuals might be triggered by current developments in or relating to the Netherlands, for example the debate concerning Islam.

#### Polarisation and extremism

Polarisation, inter-ethnic violence and xenophobia remain unabated causes of concern as far as cohesion in our society is concerned, because they reinforce the "them and us" thinking between different groups in our society. At present, however, these factors do not form an element of the terrorist threat.

At the moment, there are numerous individuals and disorganised groups of youngsters holding strong nationalist or xenophobic ideas, which are also being increasingly expressed in terms of threats and open acts of violence. The number of inter-ethnic incidents has once again increased. This development has an undeniable influence on the processes of polarisation and radicalisation. Various recent investigations into extremism, racism and feelings of ethnic threat have confirmed the existence of a gulf between population groups. However, contrary to frequent assumptions, there does not appear to have been a change in the trend since the attacks of 11 September 2001 and the murders of Fortuyn and Van Gogh. It may be that the tendency towards ethnic distancing has been around for longer than had generally been supposed.

The size of the disorganised extreme right wing has increased during the period covered by this report. Some extreme right-wing Internet sites publish belligerent pronouncements. Blood &

Honour is attracting a great deal of attention at the moment, gaining support and not shying away from the open expression of fascist ideas. Nor have confrontations with anti-fascists been avoided, although we have to bear in mind that such confrontations are sometimes also sought out from the anti-fascist side, either secretly and provocatively or otherwise.

## **Resistance**

### *Resilience*

The past year has shown an increase in resistance on the part of Muslim communities in the Netherlands toward radicalisation and violence in the name of Islam. Moderate and also more orthodox believers are increasingly distancing themselves from violent Islamic factions. This is also apparent on the Internet. Increasing numbers of mosques and Muslim organisations are also acknowledging the problem of radicalisation within their own circles. This development is intensifying.

Despite pressure on the Salafist mosques, there has been a further relentless expansion of self-confidence on the part of the Salafist centres and the ideological influence emanating from the mosques. The mosques have succeeded in improving their organisational levels, in anticipation of a growing need among Muslims for knowledge about (radical) Islam. We are seeing increasingly clear signs of a new young generation of Salafist preachers, who are not only extremely active in disseminating non-violent Salafism, but who are also well aware of the rules of the game within the Dutch constitutional system. The government's options for curbing the spread of this Salafist ideology in the Netherlands, with its anti-integration and isolationist message, have been limited until now.

It is worth pointing out that there seems to be increasing competition to establish which of the Salafist mosques in the Netherlands are the most important. The initial picture - accepted for some time now - is one of mosques propounding an ideology which could, in the longer term, have an adverse impact on the democratic constitutional system. This is a picture put forward primarily by the (national) government. The second picture is one of mosques that do not deny their orthodox persuasion, but at the

same time emphasise that they want nothing to do with radicalism. The mosques are opening up more and more to their surrounding environment. The creation of these competing pictures is fortified because increasing numbers of research bureaus and journalists are investigating the manner in which Salafism manifests itself in the Netherlands. The different pictures may in due course diminish the sense of urgency, primarily because some police officials, municipal bodies and those in the vicinity of Salafist centres are not (always) in a position to be able to perceive the actual trends towards radicalisation.

#### *Countermeasures*

Various measures have been implemented during the past year, at both national and local levels, in the context of dealing with some radical Salafist mosques. Increased pressure from the government, combined with social awareness of these mosques, continues to mean that the mosques observe moderation in public. While some imams continue to make controversial statements, the impact of the radical message has diminished because not every visitor to the mosque is now confronted with this message. Another consequence of this more moderate attitude is that increasing numbers of the more radical youngsters are turning their backs on some mosques, which might imply that in certain cases these youngsters are slipping under the radar.