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Our reference

5592832/09/NCTb

Enclosures

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*Please state the date and our
reference in your reply.
Please only discuss one
subject in your letter.*

Date 6 April 2009
Subject Summary Terrorist Threat Assessment Netherlands No. 16

Please find enclosed a summary of the sixteenth Terrorist Threat Assessment Netherlands of March 2009 (DTN16). The threat level continues to be *substantial*.

The official reporting period of the sixteenth Terrorist Threat Assessment Netherlands is from 16 September 2008 up to and including 31 December 2008, but recent developments up to and including 17 March 2009 have also been included in this analysis.

The Terrorist Threat Assessment Netherlands is prepared by the National coordinator for Counterterrorism four times a year, essentially relates to one three-month period, and is primarily intended for the Cabinet Committee on National Security. The Terrorist Threat Assessment Netherlands is also discussed with the Permanent Parliamentary Commission for the Intelligence and Security Services.

The Minister of Justice,

The Minister for the Interior
and Kingdom Relations

dr. E.M.H. Hirsch Ballin

Ms dr. G. ter Horst

Summary of the Terrorist Threat Assessment Netherlands of March 2009

Just as in the previous reporting period, the threat level in the Netherlands continues to be 'substantial'. This means that there is a realistic possibility that an attack will occur against Dutch interests at home and/or abroad. International jihadist groups still constitute a major threat for West European countries and West European interests. These groups have the capacity and the desire to hit European and Western interests abroad, such as in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region. They also still intend to carry out attacks against Dutch interests in the Netherlands and abroad. For these groups, the Netherlands continues to be seen as a 'legitimate' target because of the presence of Dutch troops in Afghanistan and the alleged insult to Islam in the Netherlands. These international jihadist threats currently constitute the most important component of the threat against Dutch interests in the Netherlands and abroad.

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Terrorism

International threat

The major part of the threat against Dutch interests in the Netherlands and abroad is formed by jihadist networks and organisations outside the Netherlands. In particular, the continued existence of the terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan and Afghanistan constitutes a serious threat to Western and consequently Dutch interests. In the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region, there are jihadist groups, such as the core of al-Qaeda and the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), which have the capacity and the desire to hit Western interests there and in Europe.

The continued existence of the terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan is related to the worrisome security situation in this country. The Pakistan government has great difficulty countering the Pakistan Taliban in the Tribal Areas (FATA) and exercising state control effectively. Despite military campaigns, this region continues to be a place where terrorists are trained and attacks are planned. In the Pakistan district of Swat, a flashpoint outside FATA, the Pakistan government attempts to restore the peace by allowing partial implementation of the sharia.

Jihadist groups in other regions, too, constitute a continuous threat to Western and consequently also Dutch interests. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIOM), a group that is mainly active in Algeria, for instance, has the capacity to hit Western interests locally and probably also to carry out attacks in Europe. In Somalia, the jihadist group of Al Shabaab is seeking association with the international jihad.

Networks in Europe

During the past reporting period, suspects of involvement in or preparations for terrorist activities were arrested in Europe. Arrests were made in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, Belgium, and Italy. In addition, Germany was confronted with several video threats in the past period. In these video messages, radicalised and converted Germans or German-speaking persons addressed the German public with threats in which they, among other things, opposed the presence of German troops in Afghanistan.

The core of al-Qaeda seized the war in Gaza between Israel and Hamas in January 2009 to call for acts of revenge against the United Kingdom. In the video, this country was held responsible for the fate of Palestinians, because of the role the United Kingdom played in history in the establishment of the State of Israel.

Networks in the Netherlands

The threat emanating from the Dutch jihadist networks has generally remained unchanged since the previous reporting period. The situation around local autonomous jihadist networks in the Netherlands continues to be relatively calm. A new development is that members of local autonomous networks have increased their contact with international jihadist groups. This development may lead to these local networks becoming increasingly associated with international jihadist networks.

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On 11 March 2009, an unknown person reported to the Amsterdam police from Brussels by telephone that three men intended to carry out an attack with explosives on shops in Amsterdam on 12 March 2009. In reaction to this report, the Amsterdam police evacuated several shops in Arena boulevard, a shopping mall in Amsterdam South-East. The police also arrested seven persons on suspicion of involvement in terrorist activities. These persons were released on 13 March 2009. There were no indications that they were involved in a possible terrorist attack. Further police investigation will have to shed more light on the backgrounds of this case.

Radicalisation and Polarisation

The war in Gaza between Israel and Hamas stirred many emotions in the Dutch Muslim communities. Even Dutch people of Turkish origin, whose reactions to events in the Middle East are generally quite moderate, reacted strongly in respect of this theme. The many reactions showed that there was mainly much concern and anger about the large number of Palestinian victims. The reactions were mainly directed towards the Dutch government, because it was said to have shown too much understanding for the nature and scope of the actions carried out by the Israeli army in Gaza. There was furthermore criticism on the Dutch media, because their coverage was said to be too one-sided (too pro-Israel). The Dutch government, however, discussed the concerns many Dutch Muslims had about the violence in Gaza and explained its position.

It cannot be excluded that the shocking images from the media of Gaza are an additional stimulus for young Muslims, in particular, to turn to radicalism. For the time being, the authorities have not established any related cases of radicalisation. This may, however, be a matter of a long period of incubation. The risk of radicalisation is increased because political Salafists in the Netherlands used the events in Gaza to propagate their message, in order to increase their group of adherents. This also applies to the international Islamic movement of Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT).

On the Dutch Internet, the number of anti-Islam statements has increased in the last few years. In particular 'right-wing' and extremist websites include statements showing a strong aversion to Islam and Muslims in general. The anti-Islam statements mainly manifest themselves during social events in which Islam and/or Muslims were involved.

Resistance

The resistance in the Dutch Muslim communities against polarisation, radicalisation, and terrorism continues to be high. In this context, various Muslim organisations opposed anti-Semitic slogans that were shouted by some, mainly Moroccan-Dutch, young people during protest demonstrations following the war in Gaza. They also reacted moderately to the film released by the local politician Jami about the Prophet Muhammad. It is furthermore increasingly noticeable that it is becoming possible in Muslim communities to discuss sensitive subjects, such as the position of homosexuals and women in Islam.

Within the Dutch salafist movement, too, growing resistance against (violent) radicalisation has been noticeable in the last few years. This tendency was also noticeable in the last reporting period. The Amsterdam salafist El Tawheed mosque, however, opened a platform for a radical Egyptian preacher again.

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