

Letter of 8 October 2012 from the Minister of Security and Justice to the House of Representatives of the States General containing a summary of the September 2012 edition of the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands (DTN30).

Threat level

The threat level for the Netherlands has remained at 'limited' since November 2009. There has been no change in the period covered by DTN30. 'Limited' means that the chance of a terrorist attack is slight, but cannot be ruled out. The primary threat is still jihadist in nature. Jihadists consider the Netherlands a legitimate target. This perception has not changed in recent months.

The threat level is considered to be limited in part because international jihadist groups are currently focused mainly on local or regional conflicts, and because the al Qa'ida core has been considerably weakened in recent years. Dutch jihadists for their part have been focused on the jihadist struggle abroad for several years. In the past few months, again, a small number of individuals have been observed travelling to jihadist conflict zones. The presence of Dutch jihadists in these conflict zones not only poses a security threat in the regions in question, but may eventually also entail a more serious threat in the Netherlands itself. The latter point is discussed further below.

Dutch national security could also be negatively affected if individuals involved in groups such as Sharia4Holland (S4H) become radicalised to the point of embracing violence. At present, there are no indications that this is the case, but the fact remains that the discourse promoted by these groups is jihadist in nature. What is more, in neighbouring countries groups with an agenda similar to S4H's are becoming visibly more militant and have even been linked to violent incidents. The possibility should thus not be ruled out that individuals involved with S4H may adopt the methods used by like-minded groups abroad. This could spark a reaction from opposing extremists, leading to increased polarisation in society. It should be emphasised, nonetheless, that S4H enjoys little popularity among Muslims in the Netherlands and has had little success in attracting new recruits.

Finally, there are no indications of a terrorist threat to the Netherlands emanating from other ideological groups. However, experience in other countries shows that this possibility should not be discounted.

International context of the jihadist threat

The elimination of members of the al Qa'ida core (mainly through ongoing drone strikes) is making it increasingly hard for the network to maintain its image as the guiding force of the global jihad. This could in due course result in regional jihadist networks' enjoying greater autonomy. What is more, as al Qa'ida's security situation worsens in Pakistan's Tribal Areas (which serve as its safe haven), its members are discussing leaving the region. This creates the possibility that some members may seek out alternative safe havens.

There are growing indications that jihadist elements are fighting in *Syria* alongside the opposition, albeit on a limited scale. The conflict in Syria is also attracting increasing attention among jihadists in various Western countries, including the Netherlands. This focus on Syria among jihadists from the West and other parts of the world could turn the country into a new jihadist conflict zone. It should also be noted that the conflict in Syria is deepening divisions in the region between Sunni and Shiite Muslims. The increased freedom enjoyed by jihadists in *Egypt* to operate in the open has in turn increased the country's appeal to Western jihadists. It has been established that both Egyptian and Western jihadists in Cairo are seeking contact with and asking the advice of the leaders of former jihadist networks in Egypt. At present, the situation in the Sinai region in particular is of concern. The lack of effective authority in this area means that jihadists, whether international or Egyptian, are able to operate freely.

Finally, the anti-Islam film *Innocence of Muslims* has caused major unrest in Muslim countries. Militant Salafists have fanned the flames, organising demonstrations and sometimes even violent attacks. These have mainly targeted US diplomatic missions in Muslim countries.

International threat – developments in jihadist conflict zones

In northern *Mali*, local jihadist forces have strengthened their position in the past few months. Al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which has been active in this area for years, has benefited from this trend and is becoming increasingly involved with local jihadist groups. Those groups' increased strength has given AQIM more scope for bolstering its power base in northern Mali. In August 2012 AQIM released new 'proof-of-life' images via al-Jazeera of the Dutchman held hostage in Mali, Sjaak Rijke. Elsewhere, the groups al Qa'ida in the Arabic Peninsula (AQAP) and Ansar al-Sharia in *Yemen* and al Shabaab in *Somalia* are losing more and more ground. This is not however to suggest that the jihadist forces in those countries have been defeated. These groups continue to fight and are increasingly applying asymmetric tactics such as hit-and-run assaults and suicide attacks. In *Kenya*, the number of

terrorist incidents has risen sharply since October 2011, a direct result of the country's military offensive in Somalia. Notably, a small number of jihadists from the West have been linked to the terrorist threat in Kenya. These Westerners allegedly also have ties to al Shabaab.

To conclude, there are indications that various regional jihadist groups, particularly in Africa, are cooperating more and more closely. This could increase the threat posed to both local and Western targets in the areas where these groups are active.

International threat – Europe and North America

On 18 July 2012 an attack was carried out in Bulgaria on a coach carrying Israeli tourists. Seven people were killed, including the Bulgarian driver and the individual responsible. It is not clear at this time who was behind this attack.

There was also an escalation of violence in Belgium and Germany in the period under review, with Salafists targeting government authorities (in Belgium) and those they perceive as opponents of Islam (in Germany). The situation in Germany illustrates the risk that a cycle of escalating violence could develop between radical Islamists and anti-Islam militants. In addition, jihadists in various European countries have been arrested in recent months on suspicion of terrorist activity. Notably, the individuals arrested in the United Kingdom are suspected of planning an attack on supporters of the English Defence League, an anti-Islamic group. This too could signal the existence of potentially violent divisions among extremists.

Another incident in the period under review showed that the terrorist threat is not exclusively jihadist in nature. On 6 June 2012, two neo-Nazis were arrested in Germany on suspicion of preparing a terrorist attack. On 5 August 2012 in the United States, six Sikhs were killed when a neo-Nazi skinhead opened fire on a Sikh temple. His actions most likely stemmed from his neo-Nazi views. The attack in the US underscores yet again the threat that can be posed by violent 'lone wolf' extremists. Finally, in August 2012, the Norwegian terrorist Anders Breivik was sentenced to 21 years in prison for the attacks he carried out in the summer of 2011, killing 77 people.

Threat to the Netherlands

Dutch jihadist individuals and groups are primarily focused on the jihadist struggle abroad. In the past few months, too, a small number of individuals have been observed travelling to jihadist conflict zones. The presence of Dutch jihadists in such areas could in time increase

the threat to Dutch interests abroad. What is more, such individuals could inspire others in the Netherlands to join them, and could utilise their networks to facilitate travel arrangements. There is also a risk that trained and experienced jihadists returning from abroad may seek to continue their activities in the Netherlands, though there are currently no indications that returning jihadists intend to commit attacks here. It must also be emphasised that the number of jihadists who have travelled abroad from the Netherlands is still small in relative terms, particularly in comparison with several other Western countries.

Violent radicalisation and polarisation

Although Islam and integration remain polarising issues in the Netherlands as in other countries, these topics are noticeably less prominent at present in the political and public debate. Issues such as the financial and economic crisis, spending cuts and the European Union are receiving more attention from politicians and the media. In Belgium and Germany, by contrast, growing polarisation has been observed in regard to Islam in general and Salafism in particular. This is illustrated by the various (violent) incidents that have taken place in these countries in recent months. These incidents, which involved militant Salafists, are not as yet indicative of a raised threat in the Netherlands. There are currently no indications that S4H aims to apply in the Netherlands the more militant tactics that have been adopted by like-minded groups in Germany and Belgium. Although S4H's provocative activities have continued to attract considerable attention in recent months, they are non-violent in nature.

Although S4H does not currently pose a violent threat, it is nonetheless important to remain vigilant. The boundary between non-violent Islamist activism and jihadism is a fluid one. Thus, there is a danger that members or sympathisers of groups like S4H, which claim to be non-violent but which promote a jihadist discourse, may become radicalised to the point of embracing violence. It is also conceivable that S4H's activism, like that of its peers in Belgium, may unleash forces which it cannot control and which could spark extremist violence.

With the exception of a few incidents, the period under review was quiet in regard to animal rights extremism and far-left and far-right extremism. Radical asylum rights groups for their part have forged a 'no-border network' aimed at promoting cooperation and coordination among asylum rights actors. The calm that has prevailed lately in the Netherlands where far-left and far-right extremism is concerned contrasts sharply with the political violence that has broken out in Greece (on both extremes) and in Italy (on the far left). In Greece the financial

and economic crisis has exacerbated long-standing resentment of immigrants, legal and otherwise, among sections of the population.

Resistance

Previous DTNs have reported a high level of social resistance among the Dutch public to ideologically motivated violence. There are no indications that this has changed in the period under review.