

**Letter of 29 June 2015 from the Minister of Security and Justice to the House of Representatives on the policy implications of the 39th edition of the Terrorist Threat Assessment, for the Netherlands (DTN39)**

Enclosed is the public version of the 39th edition of the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands (DTN39), prepared by the Office of the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV). This DTN provides information on the current threat level and the factors that influence it. Based on developments in the period covered by the present DTN, the threat level has again been maintained at 'substantial'. This means that there is a real chance of an attack in the Netherlands. The factors determining the threat in the previous DTN period still apply. The events in France and Tunisia last Friday (26 June) further underline this threat. Attacks of this nature have been within the realm of possibility for the Netherlands and other Western countries for some time now.

The government's efforts to counter the terrorist threat posed by violent jihadists are set out in the programme of action 'An Integrated Approach to Jihadism'. These measures are regularly reviewed and adapted to the latest developments. There is no reason to amend the plan at the present time. For information on the progress being made on implementing these measures, please refer to the progress report submitted to the House of Representatives at the same time as this DTN.

This letter addresses a number of important considerations from DTN39 in brief and explains government policy on factors that influence the current threat to the Netherlands. Given that the national strategy must also be seen in an international context, this letter also briefly considers the global approach to tackling violent jihadism.

**DTN39**

The threat to the Netherlands is real and complex. As mentioned above, the factors determining the threat in the previous DTN period still apply. The complexity is mainly the result of the diversity of actors and the interaction between them. The threat is posed by individuals (whether or not inspired by calls to action from conflict zones), transnationally run or facilitated networks, sleeper cells and disturbed individuals who may attempt to carry out copycat attacks.

There are close links between Dutch jihadist fighters in Syria and Iraq and like-minded individuals (whether returnees or 'stay-at-home' jihadists) in jihadist circles in the

Netherlands. At the same time jihadist networks in the Netherlands are fragmented, due to both external pressures and internal dynamics.

This DTN confirms the point made in previous editions that the threat is by no means limited to jihadist travellers and returnees, but also extends to those who never leave the Netherlands. The Netherlands is a legitimate target among jihadists, and although other European countries may figure more prominently in calls for attacks, there have also been instances where individuals have called for action to be taken in or against the Netherlands.

### **Policy implications**

Below we examine a number of factors that influence the current threat to the Netherlands and explain the policy that is being pursued to counter them.

#### *Growing concern about aspects of Salafism*

This DTN expresses concern about the growing influence of certain aspects of political Salafism in the Netherlands and the active promotion of intolerant, anti-democratic and polarising views by Salafist preachers. This ideology may help fuel forms of violent jihadism. The House of Representatives will shortly be receiving a joint analysis on Salafism by the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) and the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV), and the government's response to it, as promised previously by the Minister for Social Affairs and Employment.

#### *Possible increase in cyber capabilities among ISIS members and sympathisers*

The danger that the internet could be used as a weapon or resource has been cited on a number of occasions. A few incidents occurred during the period under review that reinforce this concern. When it comes to using the internet as a weapon, experts still assume that terrorists do not yet have the skills or means needed to cause social disruption. However, even without advanced capabilities the internet can still be used to do harm. In Europe there have been cases where jihadists have used public sources to gather information on state employees they see as opponents, such as police officers or military personnel. This ties in with the existing threat to these groups from ISIS. With this in mind, the relevant government organisations and services continue to invest in security measures and security awareness among their staff, including in relation to the use of social media and the internet.

The Dutch government is alert to cyber threats that could affect national security, including digital terrorist threats. The initiatives being taken under the National Cyber Security Strategy, which relate to awareness, detection, analysis and response, strengthen our

resilience and response to cyber threats in general, and thus also to cyber threats from terrorist organisations.

### *Tackling abuses of the immigration system*

In the period under review various media sources reported on the possible abuse of the immigration system by terrorist groups. Although these reports are unconfirmed, it is certainly conceivable that jihadists are using existing migrant routes to enter the EU clandestinely. As explained in the answers to previous parliamentary questions,<sup>1</sup> the Netherlands and the EU, including their implementing agencies, are alert to signs of infiltration of refugee flows entering Europe, and more specifically the Netherlands, by ISIS and other jihadist organisations. The European Union has taken the necessary measures to identify signs of involvement in terrorism and violent jihadism at its borders. The Dutch immigration authorities have a system that allows them to report foreign nationals who may pose a threat to national security. Internal communications remind staff of the existence of this system for flagging signs of terrorism, radicalisation and violent jihadism. To ensure that the security and intelligence services receive this information, the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND), the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA), the Royal Military and Border Police and the Aliens Police continue to invest in raising security awareness among their staff. To help in identifying such signs, these organisations are working closely with the NCTV to increase their professional expertise in this area. A training institute for counter-radicalisation (ROR) is also being set up. From September 2015 it will provide certified courses for professionals working in security, counterterrorism, immigration, care and youth care, as well as staff of the Child Protection Board and municipalities.

On 24 November 2014 the House of Representatives was informed about the establishment of a multidisciplinary team (MDT) aimed at tackling migration-related crime (House of Representatives, 2014/2015, 28 638, no. 127). The Royal Military and Border Police, Public Prosecution Service, police, IND, COA, NCTV and AIVD are working together closely in this MDT to gain a better insight into migration flows. One of the MDT's aims is to gain a complete and up-to-date picture of migrant involvement in jihadism to help tackle the problem. The Royal Military and Border Police has also drawn up a specific framework for dealing with jihadism, which is being used at the border. The intelligence and security services are receiving a growing number of indications from the immigration authorities of

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<sup>1</sup> See the answers to the written questions submitted by the members of parliament Machiel de Graaf, Sietse Fritsma and Geert Wilders (all representing the Freedom Party, PVV) concerning the article 'IS ziet immigrant als wapen' (ISIS sees immigrant as weapon), 23 February 2015.

matters that could affect national security. This is the result of both awareness-raising campaigns and an increase in the number of asylum seekers entering the Netherlands, particularly from Syria.

### **International approach**

Various international developments have heightened the threat to Western interests. For example, jihadists are capitalising on the scope created by chaos and instability in certain countries, especially Libya and Yemen. There are also signs that regional terrorist organisations joining ISIS is increasing the threat to Western countries.

The government therefore believes it is vital not only to tackle violent jihadism in the Netherlands but also for the Netherlands to contribute to international efforts on this front. This includes working more closely with other countries as well as investing in the early identification of social tensions that could lead to radicalism and, where possible, helping the countries in question to prevent radicalism arising. The Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) is a key multilateral forum for dialogue and the sharing of best practices between Western countries and countries in the relevant regions, such as the Middle East, the Maghreb and Asia. In a joint effort by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the NCTV, the Netherlands is playing an important role in this forum. In September 2015 the Netherlands and Morocco will take over the co-chairmanship of the GCTF from the United States and Turkey. The former two countries are also co-chairing the GCTF's Foreign Terrorist Fighters working group. Various other initiatives are being carried out around the world as a result of the Summit on Countering Violent Extremism, hosted by the US last February. The Netherlands is also playing an active role in the anti-ISIS coalition.<sup>2</sup> For example, together with Turkey it is co-chairing the coalition's FTF working group, whose second meeting was held on 9 June 2015 in The Hague. Furthermore, the Netherlands is taking part in other working groups aimed at cutting off ISIS's funding sources and developing an inclusive narrative to counter ISIS propaganda. The progress report will provide the House with periodic updates on other international activities.

### **Final remarks**

Since the threat level was raised in March 2013 there have been no terrorist attacks in the Netherlands. However, professional counterterrorism efforts remain essential.

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<sup>2</sup> For details, please refer to the letter to parliament of 19 June 2015 concerning the extension of the Netherlands' military contribution to the international anti-ISIS coalition (House of Representatives, 2014/2015, 27 925, no. 539).