

Letter of 9 November 2015 from the Minister of Security and Justice to the House of Representatives on the policy implications of the 40th edition of the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands (DTN40)

Enclosed please find the public version of the 40th edition of the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands (DTN40), 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.

As observed in DTN39, this summer's events in France, Tunisia and elsewhere reaffirm the current threat assessment. Such attacks have for some time been conceivable in the Netherlands and other Western countries too.

The 'comprehensive action programme to combat jihadism' is the government's policy response to the jihadist threat. The measures provided for in the action programme are interlinked and should always be assessed in conjunction with one another. For instance, some administrative measures target individuals, while others are more general in nature (such as those dealing with preventing radicalisation). This mix of measures allows the government to adjust its efforts within the existing policy framework as the situation requires. These measures are therefore subject to continuous re-evaluation, based in part on the content of the periodical DTN. Any changes made to these measures or the action programme as a whole are addressed in the fourth progress report, which is being submitted to the House along with this DTN. This also fulfils a request made by the permanent parliamentary committee on security and justice on 30 September.

In this letter I highlight several key aspects of DTN40. Following that, I explain a number of elements that influence the current threat to the Netherlands and the policy response the government has developed or is in the process of developing.

DTN40

The threat to the Netherlands remains substantial: this means the chance of an attack is real, though there are currently no specific indications of an imminent terrorist attack.

The threat, which is predominantly jihadist in nature, remains complex and involves a variety of actors. It is not only international and local networks that pose a threat but also 'lone

wolves'. The relevance of the latter was underscored on 21 August, when a lone jihadist attempted to carry out an attack on the Thalys high-speed train. This attack was foiled thanks to the actions of passengers.

Policy implications

The following section highlights a number of elements that affect the current threat to the Netherlands and explains what measures have been or will be taken in response.

Concerns about aspects of Salafism

In September 2015 the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment informed the House about the government's policy on problematic aspects of Salafism in the Netherlands.¹ In addition, it can be reported that the Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) of the Ministry of Justice will conduct a feasibility study to assess whether it is possible to determine the number of Salafists living in the Netherlands, and if so, what methods can be used to do so.

The need for up-to-date information on the prevalence of Salafism in this country is inspired by reports that Salafist organisations are providing humanitarian aid to asylum seekers living in reception centres, in some cases with a view to exerting influence over them. In instances where this involvement is deemed problematic, it will be addressed by the proposed approach to Salafism. Depending on the nature of the practices in question, the approach will follow one or more of three tracks. The official agencies in charge of the reception of asylum seekers are alert to the possibility that conditions are being attached to the aid, or that aid from certain circles is being accepted under duress. Tailor-made training courses are now being offered to raise awareness and to update, consolidate and preserve knowledge of such practices among staff at these agencies.

Within the framework of the action programme, efforts will also be made to boost the resilience of Muslim communities (measure 27) and flesh out Dutch policy on extremist speakers who require visas to enter the country (measure 20f). This was communicated to you back in March.² In the coming weeks and months, bilateral talks are scheduled at European level with a number of countries which the Netherlands has been working with on the issue of jihadism. At these meetings, information will be shared about foreign extremist

¹ Letter from the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment, 23 September 2015, 2015-2016 session, 29 614 no. 38. The letter and policy response are based on an analysis by the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) and the NCTV, published by the AIVD and NCTV on 23 September 2015, 'Salafism in the Netherlands: Diversity and Dynamics'.

² Letter from the Ministers of Security and Justice; Social Affairs & Employment; Foreign Affairs; and the Interior & Kingdom Relations, 3 March 2015, 2014-2015 session, 29 754 no. 303.

speakers who require a visa to visit European countries and who have been travelling around the continent. The Netherlands is also chair of a European working group which is exploring the scope for promoting further information exchange and the optimal use of existing European instruments.

Developments regarding migration flows and jihadism

In the period under review various media sources reported on the possible abuse of the immigration system by jihadist groups. Although these allegations have not yet been confirmed, the competent agencies and organisations in the Netherlands and Europe are not closing their eyes to this possibility.³ With this in mind the EU and the Netherlands are alert to signs that ISIS or other terrorist organisations are abusing the asylum system.

In the Netherlands a great deal has been invested in raising awareness of security issues among the staff of immigration agencies (including the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA), the Repatriation and Departure Service (DT&V), and the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND)). For example, staff at the many new COA sites that are currently being opened will receive special training on security issues. These training courses will emphasise, among other things, the importance of security awareness in the context of national security. The National Government Training Institute for the Prevention of Radicalisation (ROR), which has been operational since September, will provide courses for professionals in the broader security, counterterrorism and immigration sectors.

In general terms, potential radicalisation or jihadist aims can be identified at various points in the immigration system. Within the implementing bodies in the immigration system, a structure has been established for reporting such suspicions. Registration and screening procedures are part of that structure. In addition, information about potential radicalisation may be passed on by front-office staff and immigrants themselves.

Attention is also being paid to the risk of jihadist recruitment at centres for asylum seekers. To this end, efforts are being made to alleviate feelings of frustration among asylum seekers, since these frustrations can raise susceptibility to radicalisation and recruitment. This was one of the aims of the letter sent to all asylum seekers by the State Secretary for Security and Justice to explain the accommodation procedure, the asylum system and what they can

³ You were previously informed about measures taken at national and international level in the letter on the policy implications of DTN39 (House of Representatives, 2014-2015 session, 29 754 no. 313).

expect.⁴ Guidelines are also being drawn up for municipalities, with tips on preventing unrest and frustrations.

The WODC will conduct a study that aims to contribute to the effectiveness of procedures for flagging jihadists, jihadist recruitment practices and signs of radicalisation in the immigration system. The study will attempt to answer a number of questions: is there any evidence that jihadists have infiltrated the immigration system? What procedures are in place for flagging jihadists and signs of radicalisation in the immigration system? And what are the options for enhancing the overall quality and speed of these procedures? The study is expected to be completed by mid-2016. In short, investments are being made at all levels of the immigration system in order to better pick up on signs of potential radicalisation, recruitment or jihadist intentions.

As stated in the summary of DTN40, despite the occasional troubling indication that jihadist groups are seeking to capitalise on the influx of refugees in order to carry out attacks, there have been no confirmed cases of jihadists being sent from the Middle East or North Africa, in the guise of ordinary refugees, to act as operatives in Europe.

Violent incidents related to temporary accommodation for asylum seekers; rise in extremist statements and confrontations

As stated in DTN40, the current dynamic surrounding the influx of refugees and the popular discontent that this has unleashed in certain segments of society are giving rise to extremism. This tendency can be seen in a number of recent incidents: the storming of an asylum seekers' centre in the town of Woerden on 9 October, the daubing of graffiti on reception sites and the issuing of threats to mayors and members of municipal councils. The demonstration by anti-Islam group Pegida in Utrecht on 11 October revealed the possibility of new violent confrontations between left-wing and right-wing extremists or between left-wing extremists and right-wing populists. For the time being, the consequences of clashes between extremist groups mainly involve issues of public order and safety. Given that extremist language is no longer confined to traditional networks or organisations but is now being voiced by a disparate collection of groups and individuals, we will follow the situation closely in the months ahead to determine if additional measures are needed and if so, what they should be.

⁴ Open letter from the State Secretary for Security and Justice, 'Asylum in the Netherlands', 19 October 2015.

It should be emphasised that the existing policy framework for responding to problematic behaviour, as outlined in the letter on Salafism in the Netherlands,⁵ is applicable also to these cases. Against this backdrop, both the government and society as a whole have a duty to promote certain standards of conduct, each in their own way and with due regard for the Constitution. This will provide a counterweight to organisations and individuals that incite hatred, intolerance and anti-democratic behaviour, and attempt to restrict the freedom of others.

Tensions between Turkish and Kurdish communities

As DTN40 noted, tensions are on the rise between Kurdish and Turkish communities in the Netherlands. At the initiative of the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment, a dialogue was launched in late 2014 with various organisations representing the Turkish, Kurdish and Alawite communities. The aim of this dialogue is to foster a sense of joint responsibility for preventing conflicts and tensions in Turkey from spreading to the Netherlands and giving rise to incidents here. The organisations involved have agreed to actively call on their rank and file to deal with differences of opinion calmly and to engage in dialogue with one another in order to prevent tensions from escalating in this country.

The local authorities are responsible for maintaining public order and safety, where necessary with the support of the national authorities. At present this support, which involves advice and practical assistance, is provided in part by the Expertise Unit on Social Stability (ESS).

Threat posed by would-be jihadist travellers

DTN40 confirms the point made in previous editions that the current threat is by no means limited to jihadist travellers and returnees, but also extends to those whose attempts to leave the Netherlands have failed or been thwarted. The action programme contains provisions for dealing with such individuals. If possible, criminal investigations will be launched against unsuccessful jihadist travellers. The police, the AIVD and other parties concerned remain alert to developments and continue to share relevant information. These would-be travellers are also discussed at local level in multidisciplinary case meeting, in which the relevant national and local parties (government officials and representatives of the criminal justice system) work together closely to exchange information and devise the most effective measures. These measures aim to reduce the risk that these individuals can pose. The Counterterrorism Interim Administrative Measures Bill allows the authorities to take steps

⁵ Letter from the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment, 23 September 2015, 2015-2016 session, 29 614 no. 38.

under administrative law against thwarted – and possibly frustrated – jihadist travellers (e.g. imposing a periodic reporting requirement or a restraining order). The Council of State has now submitted its advisory opinion on the bill.

International context

The DTN notes the existence of a web of tensions with regard to Turkey. The ambivalence that these tensions reveal highlight the undiminished importance of the counterterrorism dialogue. In tandem with bilateral efforts the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) and the anti-ISIS coalition are good platforms for this purpose.

Women and girls in ISIS

Finally, the DTN concludes that thus far, women and girls have not actively taken part in fighting, though they are receiving weapons training. The Dutch approach to violent jihadism has focused for some time on women and girls, for example with regard to tackling recruitment and the prevention of jihadist travel. This approach is supported by the analysis contained in the DTN. Currently, the parties concerned are looking into whether a more gender-specific approach could be effective in combating radicalisation, recruitment and jihadist travel among women and girls. If the situation warrants it, a targeted policy will be formulated. You will be informed about the results and possible further policy developments in DTN41 and the letter detailing the policy implications of DTN41.