

Summary of the 41st edition of the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands (DTN41), March 2016

Threat level

The threat level in the Netherlands remains 'substantial' which means that the chance of an attack is real. The threat situation is still complex, with various actors (terrorist organisations, transnational networks, small cells and lone terrorists) potentially able to carry out both small- and large-scale attacks. There are currently no specific indications that attacks in or against the Netherlands are being prepared. However, the increase in the number of threats, acts of intimidation and violent incidents linked to the heated public debate about asylum seekers, migrants and Islam in the Netherlands is a cause for concern. These acts are primarily directed at political office-holders, migrants and people who speak out in support of asylum seekers, and physical sites like reception centres and mosques. On 26 February an arson attack was carried out on a mosque in Enschede at a time when people were inside. A person was arrested in this connection on suspicion of joint perpetration of attempted arson with terrorist intent. This type of violence and threatening behaviour increase feelings of insecurity among various sections of the population and can undermine the democratic process at local level.

Jihadist threat to the West

Never before have so many jihadist terrorist attacks been committed in Western countries in a single year as in 2015. The total (14) is twice as large as in 2014. Nine attacks were carried out in Western Europe (mainly in France), four in the United States and one in Australia. Recent figures show that, over the last few years, some 5,000 jihadist fighters from Western European countries have left for Syria/Iraq. At least a quarter of them have since returned to Europe. The potential danger posed by returnees, one of the main reasons why the threat level was raised to 'substantial' in March 2013 (DTN32), was made appallingly clear in Paris on 13 November, when a terrorist attack claimed the lives of least 130 people. The majority of the perpetrators had been trained in Syria, where they had been instructed to carry out attacks on their return. These were the first attacks in the West coordinated by the ISIS leadership. Although they were consistent with the prevailing threat assessment, which acknowledged the possibility of attacks in Western countries, many experts were surprised by their relative complexity and scale (in terms of numbers of victims, targets and perpetrators). The attacks and the many subsequent investigations by the police and intelligence services laid bare various vulnerabilities to jihadist attacks:

- The relevant authorities in Europe have thwarted dozens of attacks in recent years by means of effective action. But in this instance a relatively complex plot, involving numerous preparatory steps; perpetrators and accomplices; the gathering of materials for an attack; and many travel movements both to and within Europe, was not detected in time.
- With relative ease and without attracting the attention of the authorities, terrorists were able to travel to and within Europe, exploiting in this instance the mass influx of migrants into Europe. As the EU's external borders are porous and border controls in the Schengen area are very limited, it is not always possible to detect terrorists' travel movements, especially given that they also use forged or other people's identity documents.
- The Paris attacks also had another cross-border dimension. The plot was devised and largely prepared in Syria and Belgium, but carried out in France. The jihadist scene in the Brussels district of Molenbeek played a crucial role. A corollary of this insight is that counterterrorism policy and the operational effectiveness of counterterrorism partners in other European countries are just as relevant as those in one's own country.

There are a number of indications that the Paris plot is unlikely to be the only serious ISIS plot against Europe. ISIS probably has a special unit for planning attacks employing well-trained terrorists in foreign countries. In addition, a number of people implicated in the Paris attacks have yet to be apprehended, including one of the perpetrators, Salah Abdeslam. The raid carried out on 18 November 2015 on the apartment where Abdelhamid Abaaoud – one of the planners of the 13/11 attacks in Paris – was staying, probably prevented another attack. In February 2016, arrests were made in Germany of a number of Algerians who may have been planning to carry out an attack in Germany or other European countries. Furthermore, it is not only ISIS, but also the al Qa'ida core that has the intention and the capability to mount attacks in Western Europe. On several occasions in the period between the 13/11 attacks and the New Year in particular, the fear of new attacks took hold of Western governments and societies, often entailing severe disruptions to daily life. Parts of cities were temporarily paralysed, the most striking example being Brussels in late November. Several European countries, including Belgium, France and the United Kingdom, invested heavily in counterterrorism in the months after the Paris attacks. Arrests led to the dismantling of jihadist networks in a number of countries. The United Kingdom and the Netherlands decided to extend their airstrikes against ISIS to include Syria as well, and France

stepped up its aerial bombing campaign. At the same time, there was public criticism of the drastic measures being taken, including the extension, in January 2016, of the state of emergency in France 'until ISIS is defeated'. The enormous impact of media images of heavily armed military personnel in cities, camera teams on every street corner, deserted city centres and stationary trains and buses, plays into terrorists' hands. Prominent ISIS accounts on Twitter crowed that ISIS had managed to bring two European cities (Paris and Brussels) to a complete standstill. Regular paralysis of parts of society can give rise to all manner of undesirable side-effects, such as a continual fear of terrorism, growing tensions between different segments of the population, and an increase in perceived injustice if, for example, government agencies use (or are seen as using) ethnic profiling. It is therefore important, not only in situations of acute danger but also in the longer term, to carefully weigh up the implications of specific threat-related intelligence against the impact of security and counterterrorism measures.

Despite all efforts made by government authorities, it is apparent that relatively small-scale attacks cannot be prevented. Even after the 13/11 attacks, Western countries were the target of attacks or attempted attacks with a suspected or proven jihadist motive, such as the attack on an office in San Bernardino by a jihadist couple in which 14 people were killed (2 December 2015), a stabbing in the London Underground (5 December 2015), a failed attack on a police officer in Paris (7 January 2016) and an attack on a Jewish teacher in Marseille (11 January 2016). The differing motives, *modi operandi*, backgrounds of the perpetrators, and targets are characteristic of the complexity of the jihadist threat. It is unlikely that ISIS played a coordinating role in any of these incidents. However, ISIS appears to have been a clear source of inspiration in many cases, and as a rule, the terrorist group's propaganda subsequently extolled the attacks.

Threat to the Netherlands

The Netherlands still has a high profile: jihadists see it as a legitimate target. ISIS leaders have repeatedly called for attacks in the West. ISIS has warned that it will mainly carry out attacks in the countries participating in the anti-ISIS coalition. Dutch participation in airstrikes against ISIS and in Syria could raise the Netherlands' profile among jihadists. Since the announcement of the decision, jihadists have issued a number of threats against the Netherlands. Current intelligence and past experience warrant the assumption that Dutch participation in the airstrikes in Syria will entail an increased risk in and against the Netherlands in the near future. Recruiters and fighters who have joined ISIS will try to exploit Dutch air operations in Syria by stirring up feelings of frustration and persuading people to turn their backs on Dutch society. In some cases this can cause people to violently reject Dutch society or to travel to Syria or Iraq to join ISIS. At the same time, driving ISIS from its safe haven will reduce its capacity to mount attacks. The security authorities in the Netherlands are increasingly alert to potential terrorist threats. If there are grounds for doing so, the government will intensify its counterterrorism measures. As in the previous reporting period, there were no concrete indications that jihadists were preparing an attack in or against the Netherlands.

The Dutch jihadist movement does not seem to be undergoing any great changes in terms of its size. The General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) estimates that it has a few hundred members in the Netherlands and a few thousand sympathisers. New recruits compensate for the departure of jihadist travellers. While the capacity of jihadist *ideology* to mobilise people has not diminished, the jihadist *movement's* ability to do so has weakened. Its organisational strength has been sapped by the loss of leading figures who have been detained in the Netherlands or who have departed for conflict zones abroad (and possibly been killed there). Others are either unable or unwilling to assume the mantle of leadership. Dutch jihadists pose a potential violent threat. Some for example are looking to obtain weapons or are in contact with ISIS fighters in Syria who are giving advice about attacks to people in the West and pushing them in that direction.

The jihadist movement in the Netherlands has become less publicly visible since mid-2014, when various jihadists were arrested in The Hague and the surrounding area. There are now few if any rallies or demonstrations. There has also been a sharp decline in online activity. An initiative by 'Project A' (or 'Aseer', i.e. prisoners), which campaigns for 'Islamic detainees' (in practice mainly jihadist prisoners), attracted little attention despite a court case which would have warranted it. Known as the 'Context case', it involved a large group of jihadists, most of whom are from The Hague. Some new jihadist initiatives have been launched, such as the 'street dawa' project of the jihadist knowledge platform Ahlus Sunna Publications. People with jihadist leanings are also joining established Islamic charitable projects, which are then used as a vehicle to raise a specific jihadist issue, such as aiding terrorist detainees. The jihadist nature of these initiatives is not always immediately recognisable because they seem to be directed at social and religious activities in support of Muslims in general, including support for asylum seekers.

The number of Dutch jihadist travellers to Syria/Iraq is continuing to rise steadily by around four or five per month. By 1 March 2016, according to the information available to the AIVD, a total of

some 240 people had gone to jihadist conflict zones, 42 had been killed and around 40 had returned. Around 160 people are therefore still in Syria, some 40% of whom are women. At the end of February media reported about the execution by ISIS of eight Dutch jihadists and the imprisonment of 75 others. Although there may be a conflict between ISIS members in which Dutch jihadists are involved and although ISIS is known to regularly execute members from its own ranks, the execution and imprisonment of Dutch jihadist in such great numbers is for the time being considered to be improbable by AIVD. The number of confirmed jihadist travellers rose by 56 in 2015. In 2014 there were 70 confirmed instances of jihadist travel, compared with 76 in 2013. Almost all Dutch jihadist travellers known to have reached Syria/Iraq end up in areas controlled by ISIS. As described in DTN40, a number of them are in a position where they can exert a degree of influence or come into contact with people involved in planning attacks. There were very few jihadist travellers who returned to the Netherlands in 2015. It is very difficult to leave the ISIS-controlled area now. Future returnees may pose a greater threat. In many cases they will have spent a considerable amount of time in terrorists groups. Often they will have been exposed to extreme violence and been instructed in the jihadist ideology of violence. It is also likely that they will have gained experience in the use of weapons and explosives. It cannot be ruled out that Dutch jihadist travellers, too, may also be sent back with instructions to plan or carry out attacks. It is possible that in the Netherlands, too, despite the substantial deployment of resources by the authorities, jihadists will be able to stay below the radar. They could include people who leave the country unseen and return undetected. This is alarming in light of the heightened terrorist threat in Western countries.

The international context of the jihadist threat

The jihadist threat to the West stems partly from the presence of a jihadist movement in Western countries themselves and partly from developments further afield, especially in the Middle East and North Africa. The two components are closely interrelated. As far as international developments are concerned, the start of the 'Arab Spring' five years ago ushered in a worsening of the security situation which continued in the period under review. Terrorist groups are getting stronger in many countries in and around the Middle East. National actors and religious agitators are magnifying sectarian divisions. This is partly why Sunnis are pitted against Shiites in many conflict zones, supported directly or indirectly by Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shia Iran respectively. Tensions between these two powers are mounting, due in part to the execution of the Shiite cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr by the Saudis at the start of January. A number of countries in the Middle East, North Africa and Asia that are especially relevant to the jihadist threat to Western interests are examined in more detail below.

Developments in the Middle East

The military situation and balance of power in *Syria and Iraq* in the period under review have been shaped primarily by greatly increased Russian military support for the Assad regime and the attacks on ISIS by the international coalition. Since 30 September 2015, the Russian air force has been carrying out airstrikes on combat groups in Syria that are fighting the Assad regime. Although these airstrikes are also hitting ISIS, Russia is mainly attacking combat groups that pose a more direct threat to Assad. Syrian government forces made important territorial gains in the northwest of Syria at the expense of opposition groups at the start of 2016.

In recent months ISIS has come under intense military pressure in both Syria and Iraq. Its territorial losses are mainly apparent in the northwest of Syria, where the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have captured territory from ISIS with air support from the anti-ISIS coalition. In addition, the Syrian army have in some places succeeded in pushing back ISIS with support from Russian airstrikes. ISIS is under even more pressure in Iraq than in Syria. In November 2015 ISIS lost the town of Sinjar to Kurdish combat forces and in December 2015 the Iraqi army was able to largely expel the group from Ramadi, the capital of the Sunni province of Anbar, the cradle of ISIS. Air support from the anti-ISIS coalition played an important role. Also, the expansion of the self-proclaimed 'caliphate' in the form of *wilayats* (provinces) in other countries has for the time being been halted. Since June 2015, ISIS has not created any new *wilayats* outside its heartland in Syria and Iraq, although combat groups are still joining ISIS-related groups in a number of countries. In various countries, groups of this kind are continuing to carry out attacks and attempting to enlarge their territories, as in Libya for example. The divide in the international jihadist landscape between ISIS and al Qa'ida, which first manifested itself publicly in April 2013, still persists. In some theatres of operations, such as Afghanistan and Syria, the two sides are fighting out their differences on the battlefield. The divide is also clearly apparent in their propaganda.

With ISIS militarily under pressure in its heartland in Syria and Iraq, it has stepped up its operations in and against the countries that have taken up arms against it. As noted, ISIS staged a

major attack in Paris in 2015. ISIS has probably devised several plots against Western countries. ISIS claimed responsibility for the downing of a Russian charter flight above Sinai by means of an explosive smuggled on board. In a number of countries in the region, attacks have occurred for which ISIS claimed responsibility or in which ISIS involvement was suspected (especially in Turkey). ISIS's loss of territory in Iraq and Syria does not yet mean that the group is on the brink of defeat. ISIS has proved to be a resilient organisation that has time and again been able to adapt to altered circumstances and to attract new recruits. Moreover, ISIS can only be permanently defeated in Syria and Iraq if Sunnis in those countries have a political alternative. There is no prospect of such an alternative for the time being. A peace process is in its early stages in Geneva, but it cannot for the time being be expected to yield any results because of the wide divergence in interests and the fact that not all relevant parties are represented. A two-week truce came into effect on 27 February, primarily in order to allow the delivery of aid supplies to the conflict zone. The terrorist groups Jabhat al-Nusra (JaN) and ISIS were excluded from the cessation of hostilities. It is expected that the actions of ISIS in Syria/Iraq will continue to contribute to the terrorist threat to Western countries, including the Netherlands, for a considerable time. The same is true of other jihadist groups, like JaN. As reported in DTN40, JaN is trying to adopt a moderate image, for instance by denouncing the atrocities committed by ISIS. It has also emphasised that its current focus is on fighting in Syria and not on carrying out attacks in the West, but this is little more than window dressing.

On 12 January 2016, Istanbul was the scene of a suicide attack on Western – mainly German – tourists. This was the third attack attributed by the Turkish authorities to ISIS. More attacks directed against the tourism sector in Turkey, and hence Westerners, cannot be ruled out in the coming months. *Turkey* is increasingly being drawn into a spiral of international violence and tension around the conflicts in neighbouring Syria and Iraq. DTN40 stated that Turkey's policy on ISIS had long been ambivalent, but that there were signs that Turkey was actually combating the ISIS threat, for example by countering the ISIS presence in Turkey more actively by monitoring the border with the ISIS-controlled area in Syria more strictly and making the Incirlik airbase available for coalition airstrikes against ISIS. In response to the attacks in Istanbul in January 2016, there was a new wave of arrests and Turkey carried out artillery bombardments of ISIS areas in Syria and Iraq. Since October 2015, a series of arrests have been made of ISIS supporters. Stricter checks were also introduced at airports, and more jihadist travellers, including those from the Netherlands, were stopped. It is still unclear how far these steps are effectively preventing ISIS from operating in Turkey. Besides ISIS, Turkey is also fighting the Kurdish PKK and its Syrian allies, partly due to fears about their territorial ambitions. In the period under review, the Turkish army greatly intensified its operations against the terrorist organisation PKK in the southeast of Turkey and recently also attacked positions of the PKK-affiliated Syrian-Kurdish PYD in northern Syria. A large-scale suicide attack took place in Ankara on 17 February 2016 on a military convoy, killing 28 people. Responsibility was claimed by the 'Kurdistan Freedom Falcons' (TAK), a terrorist group. Although Turkey has shown that it is taking more action against ISIS and other terrorist organisations, it remains to be seen whether this marks the start of a trend. The war in *Yemen* is playing into the hands of terrorist groups like al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and ISIS, which are exploiting the conflict to further extend their spheres of influence. It is not possible to indicate precisely how strong the two groups now are in Yemen. What is clear is that ISIS is gaining a firmer foothold. ISIS has mounted regular attacks in Yemen since March 2015. The perpetrator of a suicide attack on the presidential palace in Aden on 28 January 2016 may have been a Dutch jihadist. AQAP also carries out attacks in Yemen. Although the group is now focused primarily on Yemen, AQAP still represents a threat to the US and the West.

Developments in North Africa and the Sahara

Large parts of the region are in the grip of political instability and economic malaise. Human misery and hopelessness provide a fertile breeding ground for radicalisation. Jihadist groups are benefiting and becoming stronger in many countries in the region. As the jihadist groups are also pursuing an international agenda, this increases the threat posed to Western interests. Attacks on Western targets are a regular occurrence. In *Libya* there are still many groups fighting for power. In 2015, ISIS succeeded in holding and gradually expanding its territory, despite resistance from al Qa'ida-affiliated militias. The centrally located port of Sirte has become an ISIS stronghold. The movement is also managing to recruit a range of foreign jihadist combatants in Libya. As far as is known, no Dutch jihadists have recently left for Libya. ISIS is also carrying out attacks in oil extraction areas to structurally weaken – and in time perhaps to take control of – oil production, storage and distribution. The implosion of the Libyan state has had a destabilising effect on neighbouring countries as well. Various jihadist combat groups, allied to ISIS or al Qa'ida, are using Libyan

coastal territory for part of their planning, training and preparations for attacks on Western and other targets in Tunisia, Algeria and Mali.

As noted in earlier DTNs, the security situation in *Egypt*, particularly in the Sinai, has worsened due to the increasingly visible presence of terrorist groups. One of the most active terrorist groups in Egypt is Wilayat Sinai (WS), also known as 'ISIS Sinai Province'. Besides government targets, WS has also been focusing on hitting tourist spots, committing multiple smaller attacks and also downing a Russian charter flight on 31 October 2015. The al-Sisi government has been unable to tackle the group effectively. WS can be expected to target Western tourists more often in future. The southern part of *Mali* is increasingly becoming a combat zone for jihadist groups. On 22 November Al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) committed a major attack on the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako, where many foreign guests were staying, claiming 22 lives. AQIM is also carrying out attacks outside Mali. On 16 January 2016 in the capital of neighbouring Burkina Faso an attack took place on a cafe and hotel popular mainly with Westerners and members of the elite. The attack claimed 30 lives, including that of one Dutch national.

Afghanistan

The security situation in Afghanistan is also deteriorating, which is playing into the hands of extremist organisations. The leadership struggle within the Taliban, which arose after the announcement of Mullah Omar's death, has not detracted from the effectiveness of the movement's military operations. The Taliban now controls more territory in Afghanistan than at any time since 2001. ISIS is also gaining strength. The so-called Khorasan Province is mainly active in the east of the country. There are signs that ISIS is now also pursuing combat activities or carrying out small-scale attacks in other provinces. This is giving rise to confrontations with the Taliban in places. Al Qa'ida also seems to be benefiting from the power vacuum in Afghanistan.

Somalia

Al Shabaab continues to make its presence felt in Somalia and neighbouring countries such as Kenya, and its targets include Western targets. On 3 February, there was a failed attack on a Somali aircraft. As far as is currently known, a man brought explosives on board. Only the attacker himself died in the explosion. Ten days later al Shabaab claimed responsibility. According to the claim of responsibility, the attack was specifically aimed at representatives of Western security services and Turkish NATO troops believed to have been on board. ISIS has now also succeeded in gaining a foothold in Somalia. This emerged for the first time last October when a key al Shabaab cleric and 20 al Shabaab combatants defected to ISIS. However, al Shabaab's leadership maintains an ambivalent attitude to ISIS. As was noted in DTN40, many of the dozens of Western jihadists in al Shabaab are dissatisfied and want to leave Somalia. It is possible that some of them may now decide to remain in Somalia and join ISIS. There is also a chance that both al Shabaab and ISIS may use violence to raise their profile in the region and stand out from the other. This could increase the jihadist threat in Somalia and neighbouring countries in the period ahead.

Southeast Asia

ISIS supporters in Southeast Asia are now also seeing opportunities to cause unrest. In *Indonesia* this has resulted in terrorist violence and human casualties. On 14 January jihadists used firearms and explosives to attack a police station, a branch of US coffee conglomerate Starbucks and a shopping centre in the centre of Jakarta. The attacks, whose targets included sites visited by large numbers of Westerners, were less than professional in their execution, and the death toll was accordingly low. These were the first jihadist attacks on Westerners in Indonesia since 2009. ISIS claimed responsibility in its magazine Dabiq, but it is unclear to what extent ISIS's leadership authorised or directed these attacks.

Migration flows and terrorism

The absence of airtight controls at the EU's external borders and the wide scope for free movement within the Schengen area offers terrorists the opportunity to travel to and within Europe with the help of counterfeit identity documents or documents belonging to other individuals. At least two of the Paris attackers travelled to Europe as part of the flow of migrants. They travelled by ship from Turkey to Greece, where they were registered. There are questions to be raised about the current capacity and ability of the European immigration and security services to keep track of the potential presence of jihadists within the influx of refugees. There is also a risk that terrorists may abuse the asylum procedure. Although the authorities in the Netherlands are alert to this risk and asylum seekers are screened by the organisations involved, it cannot be ruled out that terrorists may be able to use the Dutch asylum procedure to obtain a residence permit. Despite increasing signs that jihadists are abusing migration flows and/or asylum procedures, there are no confirmed cases of asylum seekers currently involved in an asylum procedure in the Netherlands who have joined the migration flow for jihadist purposes. In Germany there have been a few cases in which

the asylum procedure may have been abused. Two of the Algerians arrested in early February (see above) were staying in a refugee reception centre in Attendorn. Furthermore, the man who on 7 January 2016, exactly one year after the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*, stormed a police station armed with a meat cleaver, was said by the German authorities to have applied for asylum in seven European countries and had 20 different identities. The man, who was probably Tunisian, was staying in an asylum reception centre in Recklinghausen, Germany. It is unclear whether he travelled to Europe with the intention of carrying out terrorist activities. However, in this instance the system of sharing asylum seekers' fingerprint data in the European Union would appear not to have functioned effectively. Obtaining lawful residence status as a refugee offers the individual concerned the benefit of being able to travel within Europe. Asylum seekers are also legally entitled to reside and travel within the Netherlands during their asylum procedure, making this more advantageous than illegal residence. In time an individual who has refugee status can become a Dutch citizen.

Possible terrorist financing through non-profit organisations

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an international intergovernmental organisation whose aims include tackling terrorist financing, said in 2014 that non-profit organisations that deal in areas like housing, social services, education and healthcare and that are located in or near regions where terrorists are active, face the risk of being exploited for the purpose of terrorist financing. In a recent report the FATF also warned that some of its member jurisdictions are seeing an increase in the abuse of non-profit organisations that provide humanitarian aid. The report mentions that the Netherlands' Financial Intelligence Unit has indicated that various foundations and non-profit organisations in the Netherlands may be linked to individuals who belong to the jihadist movement. Such involvement may result in terrorist financing. Financial backers of terrorism can gain important benefits from membership of a non-profit organisation or its board. It not only lends them status; it also enables them to generate funding for humanitarian purposes. Even in cases where the donors are acting in good faith, funds may be misused for other purposes. Such membership also makes it possible to carry out financial transactions and, in the event of arrest, to provide an explanation for the transportation of large sums in cash.

ISIS-affiliated individuals adopting 'doxing' as a modus operandi

The Netherlands Defence Intelligence and Security Service (MIVD) reports that, in the period under review, ISIS-affiliated individuals have continued to engage in 'doxing'. Doxing is the use of social media and other means to discover and publish confidential personal data. As far as is known, Dutch military personnel have not yet been targeted at this stage. This modus operandi makes military personnel and their loved ones more vulnerable to serious threats, such as assassination or attacks like those seen over the past three years in London and Toulouse/Montauban. Doxing is not used only against military personnel, but also against police officers and others working in the realm of security. The personal data disclosed to a wider audience through doxing can be used both to incite assassinations and other types of attacks and to actually carry out such terrorist activities.

Radicalisation and extremism

In DTN40 it was noted that the tougher approach taken towards Salafist preachers may lead some *political Salafists* in the Netherlands to take a more prominent, and possibly more radical, stance. The period under review witnessed the outbreak of a heated debate on Salafism. The policy of excluding extremist preachers who require visas to enter the Netherlands was stepped up in 2015. In the final quarter of 2015 the House of Representatives also passed a number of motions calling for action against Salafist utterances and organisations in the Netherlands. Like the limited ban on clothing that covers the face, these proposals have elicited a strong reaction among both proponents and opponents. Various Salafists have characterised the motions as evidence of anti-Muslim discrimination. In doing so they tap into a much more widely held sense of deprivation and exclusion felt by non-Salafist Muslims as well. This could make Salafism more appealing to a larger group. In late 2015 controversy also arose concerning the Salafist foundation alFitrah in Utrecht, which was alleged to be preaching intolerance and accepting money from foundations that had ties to terrorist organisations.

As noted in DTN40, the threat posed by *left- and right-wing extremism* remains largely determined by developments related to the refugee crisis. In the Netherlands, those opposed to taking in refugees are drowning out the voices of those in favour. Public support for refugees is coming under pressure, due in part to various negative incidents in this country and abroad. The attacks in Paris and the mass assaults in Cologne on New Year's Eve have undermined support. During the period under review, in various municipalities such as Steenbergen, Geldermalsen, Heesch and Enschede local administrators and politicians were threatened and public consultation meetings

were accompanied by disorder. In some municipalities houses occupied by people with refugee status and sites earmarked as reception centres were the target of graffiti and vandalism. The hashtag introduced by PVV leader Geert Wilders – *kominverzet* ('resist') – and variations on it are regularly being used to mobilise groups of opponents online. The name and image of Mr Wilders, who says he supports only peaceful resistance, are being abused by extremists who go much further than that. For instance, in December fireworks were thrown at the home of a Somali family in Panterden, and a pamphlet was hung up containing racist text and a photograph of Mr Wilders. To highlight their concerns, individuals and groups on the extreme left and right are becoming increasingly active on the subject of asylum and Islam. There is therefore a realistic prospect of violent confrontations between the factions. These groups or individuals may also become further radicalised and opt for a more unlawful *modus operandi*.

Among *extreme right-wing* groups and individuals, the shift that has been discernible over the past year and a half from the traditional (neo-Nazi) extreme right towards an anti-Islam stance has continued. The jihadist threat combined with the large influx of asylum seekers into Europe is offering organised extreme right-wing groups in the Netherlands the opportunity to bring their anti-Islam sentiments and criticism of European cooperation to a wider audience than just their traditional supporters. However for the time being, the extreme right is not succeeding in mobilising large groups of people across the country. The main focus of the extreme right-wing party the Dutch People's Union (NVU) is on distributing propaganda. Other extreme right-wing groups are also trying to broaden their support.

The escalation in the number and severity of incidents at mosques, asylum reception centres, public consultation meetings and the like is worrying, particularly because threats and acts of intimidation can undermine the local democratic process. These incidents may also make violence seem like a more viable option for others. On 26 February a fire was started in a mosque in Enschede. People were present in the mosque at the time. One person was arrested in this connection on suspicion of joint perpetration of attempted arson with terrorist intent. The man's background and motives will have to be established by means of an investigation. If terrorist intent is indeed established, this will be the first time that an (in this case unsuccessful) terrorist attack targeting immigrants or Muslims has been carried out in the Netherlands. More such incidents cannot be ruled out.

Since the autumn of 2015, in view of developments connected with the influx of asylum seekers, the *extreme left-wing* organisation AFA (Anti-Fascist Action) has been focusing almost entirely on stopping and blocking demonstrations by the anti-Islam movement Pegida. These actions may be accompanied by violence. Other extreme left-wing groups, such as the asylum rights extremists of the Anarchist Anti-Deportation Group of Utrecht and the Anarchist Group of Amsterdam, are continuing to take action against institutions connected with asylum policy in the Netherlands (such as the asylum reception centre in Zeist and the custodial complex at Schiphol). There are no indications of any terrorist attacks from the extreme left. Little activity by *animal rights extremists* has been observed for several years.

Polarisation

Polarisation is certainly not purely a negative phenomenon. Thinking in terms of 'us and them' creates a group dynamic that can have a positive impact on society. Furthermore, a healthy political and public debate is essential for a thriving democracy. However, polarisation can have harmful effects. It can instil a sense of fear and insecurity in parts of the population and lead to social exclusion. Trust in government and other authorities can also be undermined. Insecurity and declining trust in institutions can undermine resilience to extremism. It is worrying that we are currently seeing a rise in the number of areas where the Netherlands is experiencing the negative side of polarisation.

Many Dutch nationals of Turkish and Moroccan descent (including those with a higher education) feel that they are being excluded by mainstream Dutch society and viewed as members of an ethnic or religious group rather than individuals. This conclusion is reflected in the study 'Worlds of Difference' (*Werelden van Verschil*) published by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP). Many of the young people in this group do not feel like part of Dutch society; 20% of Turkish and 15% of Moroccan Dutch nationals are mainly oriented towards their own group of origin and less so towards the Netherlands; this also applies to their choice of social circles. Around half of Turkish and Moroccan Dutch nationals feel predominantly Turkish or Moroccan and often associate with people of the same origin. They have little or no sense of feeling Dutch. This trend towards greater separation between population groups in the Netherlands is worrying for all kinds of reasons, one of them being that it offers a potential breeding ground for radicalisation. According to current socio-psychological theories, feelings of exclusion and injustice increase susceptibility to radicalisation.

Resilience

As stated in previous DTNs, the Dutch public is generally resistant to violence committed on ideological grounds. However, as was reported above, various acts of violence have been committed in connection with the controversy surrounding asylum seekers and people have been threatened with serious violence. This could indicate that resorting to or threatening violence is becoming a more viable option for some groups or individuals.

Research by the SCP shows that the degree of understanding felt for youths who leave the Netherlands to fight for ISIS and for people who commit violence for the sake of their religion does not differ significantly between young people from ethnic minorities and young people who are ethnically Dutch. According to this study, roughly 2% of Turkish and Moroccan Dutch nationals have a high degree of understanding for young people who leave to fight for ISIS. Among ethnically Dutch young people, the percentage is the same.

Consequences of assistance for terrorist organisations becoming clearer

On 10 December 2015 The Hague district court gave judgment in the so-called 'Context case', which resulted from a major criminal investigation into a large group of jihadists in the vicinity of The Hague. Nine suspects were on trial and all of them were convicted. Six men were given custodial sentences of between three and six years for participation in a criminal organisation with terrorist intent. Two men and a woman received shorter sentences. The district court found that the six defendants who received longer sentences were part of a Hague recruiting organisation that incited the commission of violence against the public authorities and facilitated and funded young people wanting to travel to Syria to join the conflict. On 18 February Rotterdam district court imposed custodial sentences of between six months and a year-and-a-half on three men from Arnhem and Doesburg for participation in a terrorist organisation and for terrorist financing. The men had sent money and goods to jihadists staying in Syria. In its judgment the district court referred to the recent public policy document of the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) entitled 'Life with ISIS: the Myth Unravelled', which paints a shocking picture of the actual lives of jihadist travellers in ISIS-controlled territory. On 18 February Breda district court imposed an 18 month custodial sentence on a man for recruiting minor asylum seekers for ISIS. Publications such as the aforementioned 'Life with ISIS' are revealing more and more about living conditions in ISIS-controlled territory and the acts of violence committed there by jihadist travellers. The court convictions are placing increasingly clear legal restrictions on recruitment and support for terrorist organisations. Publications and convictions may have the effect of discouraging individuals who are considering putting jihadist ideology into practice. However, although criminal law may be an effective counterterrorism instrument in specific cases, it can never eliminate the causes of the emergence and growth of the jihadist movement. An effective policy must always strike the right balance between preventive and suppressive measures.