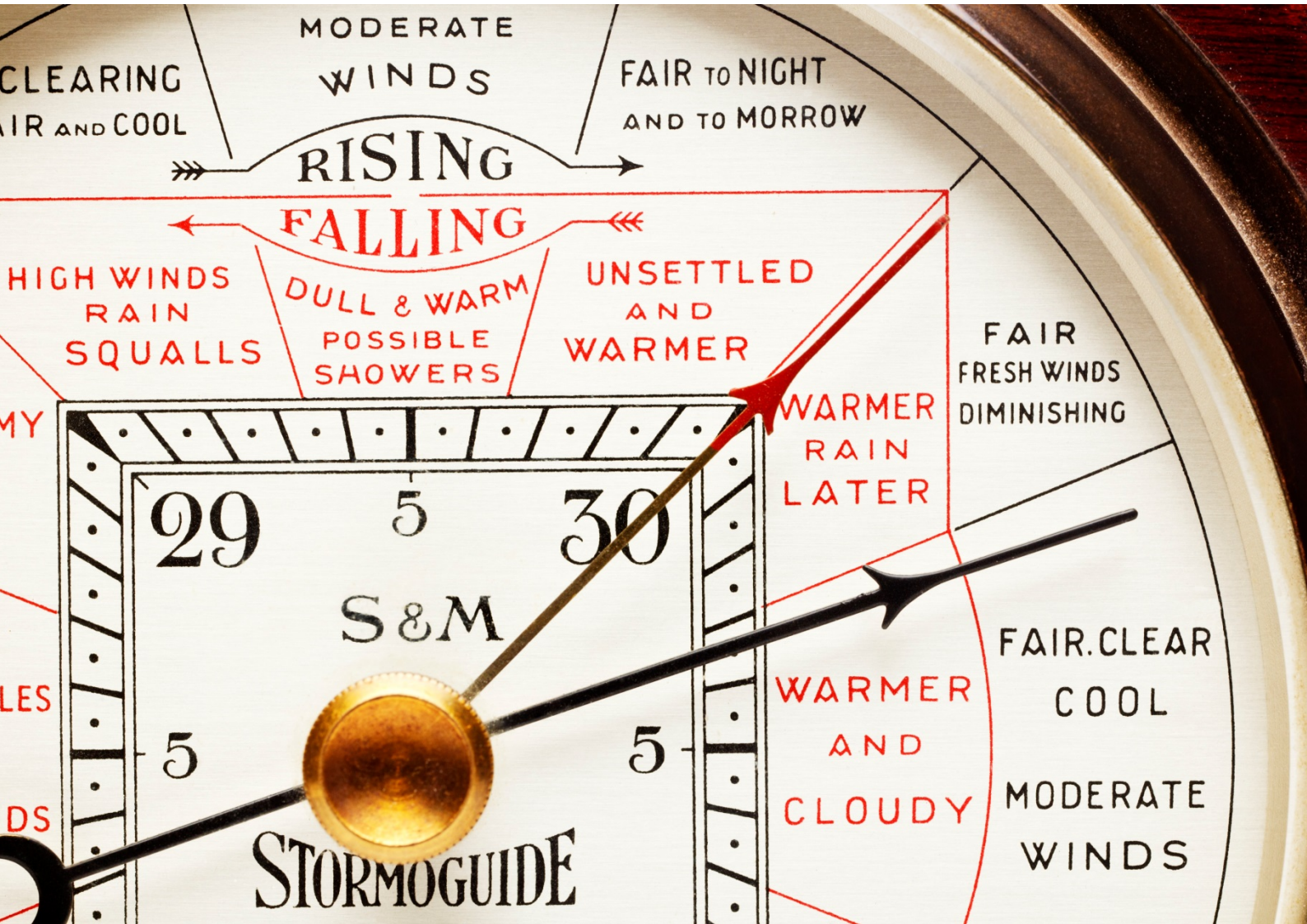




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Ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie

Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands 43

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The threat level in the Netherlands remains at 'substantial', level 4 on a scale of 1 to 5. This means that the chance of an attack in the Netherlands is real, but that there are no specific indications that an attack is being prepared. At present, the threat to the Netherlands is still primarily jihadist in nature, though in the current polarised climate with regard to Islam, asylum seekers, integration, the EU and Turkey, there is also a chance that acts of violence could be committed by either the far right or far left. It is conceivable that the level of polarisation in the Netherlands could increase between now and the parliamentary elections in March 2017.

Threat level

4



General threat level

Attacks and serious, ideologically inspired, violent incidents, like those that have occurred elsewhere in Europe over the past two years, could also happen in the Netherlands. The international terrorist networks of ISIS and al Qa'ida also have a presence in this country. Among the most conceivable scenarios is an attack directed, encouraged or inspired by ISIS. ISIS is determined to carry out new attacks, particularly in Western Europe and especially now that it is under pressure militarily in the Middle East and North Africa. It is possible that there are still dozens of ISIS operatives (attackers sent by ISIS, and their accomplices) in Europe. In addition to the threat posed by ISIS, the threat of large-scale attacks in Europe by al Qa'ida remains real.

A series of attacks in a number of countries, including Germany and France, in summer 2016 confirms that lone attackers continue to pose a threat. Several of these attackers acted alone, but also received a certain amount of 'coaching' from ISIS. ISIS 'attack coaches' seek out vulnerable people who are easily influenced and not yet on the radar of the security authorities. For some perpetrators, psychological and social problems were a motivating factor in their decision to engage in violence. It has also become clear that right-wing extremist ideology can serve as a source of inspiration. The terrorist who killed nine people in Munich modelled himself on the Norwegian far-right terrorist Anders Behring Breivik.

In the current polarised climate with regard to Islam, asylum seekers, integration, the EU and Turkey, there is a chance that acts of violence could be committed by either the far right or far left. It is conceivable that the level of polarisation in the Netherlands could increase between now and the parliamentary elections in March 2017. During campaign season there is an increased risk that a lone individual could commit a violent act.

Terrorist threat in the Netherlands

The terrorist threat facing the Netherlands resembles that facing the rest of Western Europe. The Netherlands' profile among jihadists (i.e. the degree by which this country is viewed as a target) is comparable to that of other European countries. Although the Netherlands is no longer involved in airstrikes, it does still take part in other activities of the anti-ISIS coalition. On account of its participation in current and past military missions in Islamic countries, jihadists still consider the Netherlands as an 'enemy of Islam'.

Coaching of attacks

In contrast to the complex series of attacks in Brussels and Paris, which were directly masterminded by the ISIS leadership, the organisation's involvement in the attacks carried out in Europe in summer 2016 was less immediate. Several attacks in countries like Germany and France were 'coached'. In the case of some perpetrators, psychological and social problems or disorders probably were a motivating factor in their decision to engage in violence. In the Netherlands, too, there have been cases where vulnerable people have proved susceptible to the violent ideology of ISIS. In August, for example, a man with a history of mental instability in combination with jihadist ideas was arrested in Eindhoven. The attack in Munich in July 2016 shows that far-right ideology can also inspire lone attackers. Over the past year the Netherlands has witnessed a resurgence in right-wing extremist ideas, in part due to the polarised debate on issues like Islam and asylum seekers. Acts of violence by the far right, such as the attack on a mosque earlier this year in Enschede, remain conceivable in the Netherlands.

Terrorist networks

International terrorist networks are active on Dutch soil, as confirmed by the arrest of the Tunisian-French ISIS operative Anis B. in March 2016 and three related arrests in July 2016. From its base in the Middle East, ISIS has sent possibly dozens of operatives to Europe, whose identities (and intentions) are as yet unknown to security authorities. It is therefore conceivable that an ISIS cell may have a Dutch target in mind.

ISIS is not the only international terrorist network that poses a threat to the Netherlands. The al Qa'ida core has both the intention and the ability to attack targets in the West. As a European country, the Netherlands is also seen as an enemy by al Qa'ida.

Suspected summer threat

In summer 2016, security at Schiphol Airport was increased after security services received intelligence about a suspected threat. This intelligence subsequently proved to be incorrect. In autumn 2016 various international media outlets reported that Schiphol may have been a target for terrorists at the time of the Paris attacks. French media, drawing on investigative work by the French police, referred to a laptop in the possession of terrorists belonging to the Paris-Brussels network which contained a digital folder entitled 'groupe Schiphol'. The same media reports mentioned that on 13 November 2015 – the day of the Paris attacks – two terrorists from the Paris-Brussels network may have travelled to Amsterdam. Security analysts factored in all available information when assessing the security level at Schiphol.

Dutch jihadist movement

For a variety of reasons, the Dutch jihadist movement – which has adherents in both the Netherlands and in Syria/Iraq (and to a lesser extent in other foreign countries) – poses a terrorist threat to the Netherlands. Dutch jihadists can be found within the ranks of international terrorist networks. When planning attacks in Europe, ISIS, al Qa'ida and other jihadist groups can make use of Dutch attackers, facilitators and accomplices. In light of this, it is conceivable that Dutch jihadists could be deployed to carry out suicide attacks. Terrorists planning an attack on Dutch soil could make use of Dutch (or Dutch-speaking) jihadists in Syria who know the Netherlands and speak the language. At present there are still around 190 people from the Netherlands in Syria and Iraq. Women and minors (aged nine and above) are also counted in this figure because they too may pose a threat.

The jihadist movement in the Netherlands – which consists of a few hundred actual members and a few thousand sympathisers – was, until recently, focused on the conflict in Syria. Since early 2016 the number of jihadists travelling to conflict zones abroad has been declining. As of 1 November 2016 there have been a total of around 270 jihadist travellers since 2012, 44 of whom have been killed (figures from the AIVD). Now that leaving the country to take part in jihad has become more difficult, the movement may shift its focus to the Netherlands itself. This may take the form of *dawa* (recruitment/preaching). One possible indication of this is the increase in online activity by Dutch jihadists in summer 2016. But it is also conceivable that jihadists living in the Netherlands could respond to the constant stream of exhortations on the part of ISIS and al Qa'ida to commit terrorist violence in one's own country. A point of concern in this regard is that Dutch jihadists in Syria and their sympathisers in the Netherlands have become highly security-conscious and typically communicate through closed channels. There is also a conceivable threat posed by ISIS sympathisers who have not yet come to the attention of the Dutch authorities.

Returnees

According to figures from the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), around 40 jihadist travellers have returned to the Netherlands, most of whom have been back in the country for some time. There have hardly been any new returnees in the past two years. There are indications that some Dutch jihadists would like to leave Syria, but only a small number have managed to reach the Netherlands. A few Dutch jihadists have left ISIS, but are being detained by non-jihadist groups in the region. If the ISIS 'caliphate' is defeated militarily or collapses, the number of returnees is expected to rise. An increasing number of returnees will probably strengthen the domestic jihadist movement in the Netherlands and thus magnify the threat it poses.

Terrorist threat in Europe

Over the past few months there have been a number of very diverse attacks in Western countries, more than in the period covered by the previous assessment (DTN42). The considerable threat posed by jihadist terrorism in the West has again come to the fore, and this threat will persist in the months ahead. More attacks are likely. They may take the form of attacks by jihadist cells sent here from Syria by ISIS's external operations unit. European security services assume that there are still operatives at large.

Attacks could also be carried out by lone individuals, either on their own initiative or with a certain amount of logistical assistance from ISIS members. A striking number of attackers in Europe were known to have had psychological problems. With a minimum of effort ISIS has succeeded in unleashing a wave of violence and fear in Europe. The ISIS 'brand' even stands to benefit from non-jihadist attacks. The July 2016 attack in Munich was committed by a right-wing extremist. Yet the public initially assumed that it was just another example of jihadist violence.

Jihadist travel

Jihadist organisations have various methods for enabling operatives to travel covertly to Europe. For example, ISIS operatives have repeatedly infiltrated refugee flows in order to enter Europe clandestinely. They have also exploited asylum procedures in European countries to form or support sleeper cells. In summer 2016 various people who had requested asylum were involved in attacks in Europe, some of which were inspired or directed by ISIS. It should be noted, however, that most of the people who carried out an attack that was organised, encouraged or inspired by ISIS were in fact European nationals.

Al Qa'ida attack threat

The al Qa'ida core continues to pose a significant threat to the West. By carrying out large and complex attacks, the group aims to end the West's involvement in Islamic countries.

International developments

Intense military pressure in both the Middle East and North Africa has cost ISIS territory, leaders and supply routes. Since the previous assessment, ISIS has lost ground in Syria and Iraq and has failed to make any substantial territorial gains to compensate. ISIS has also lost various leaders, including Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, its spokesman and head of an attack unit. Since the start of coalition airstrikes in August 2014, ISIS has lost more than 40% of its territory in Iraq. In Syria ISIS's losses include the strategic city of Manbij and the last stretch of territory that gave the 'caliphate' direct access to the Turkish border. It will now be far more difficult for ISIS to transport combatants, goods and arms from Turkey to the 'caliphate'. The Turkish authorities have, for their part, taken additional measures to better monitor the borders. It remains to be seen if these steps succeed in cutting off all supply lines from Turkey to ISIS.

Although the 'caliphate's' territorial cohesion is under increasing strain, ISIS's capabilities as a terrorist organisation have not yet been fundamentally damaged. ISIS has been preparing terrorist plots for some time, sending dozens of operatives (or more) to Europe to carry out attacks. For ISIS, military defeats are expected to serve as an impetus to carry out more attacks against the West and thus maintain its image as a strong organisation.

In late July 2016 Jabhat al-Nusra (JaN) announced that it would henceforth be known as Jabhat Fath al-Sham (JFS). This move is evidently an attempt to distance itself from al Qa'ida. However, in terms of both its ideology and its organisation, JFS remains part of al Qa'ida and thus poses a direct threat to the West.

The rivalry between ISIS and al Qa'ida has not diminished. At the same time, however, it is clear that some jihadists in the West make no distinction between the two groups. The perpetrator of the not entirely successful attacks in New York and New Jersey on 17 and 18 September drew inspiration from the leaders of both groups.

In August 2016, a number of Dutch nationals were injured in bombings in Thailand. It is still unclear who was responsible for these attacks. A hostage situation and massacre by an ISIS cell in the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka in July 2016 again showed that Westerners, including Dutch nationals, can fall victim to extremist, ISIS-inspired violence even outside the Middle East and North Africa.

Polarisation, radicalisation and extremism

A focus on radicalisation is integral to the Dutch approach to counterterrorism, because in the most extreme cases radicalisation can lead to terrorist violence. Polarisation is an important issue because not only does it offer an outlet for feelings of frustration, it can also create a breeding ground for radicalisation.

Polarisation

Many of the polarising conditions that can have harmful social repercussions currently exist in the Netherlands. These include such divisive issues as: integration, the position of Muslims in society, the desirability of further European integration, developments in Turkey, the influx of migrants into Europe and the reception of asylum seekers, and questions of identity. The social friction caused by these issues exists in a context of a heightened terrorist threat. Polarisation puts pressure on the quality of our open society and local democracy. This is apparent from the many threats – mainly online – received by people who speak out publicly on polarising issues. The present reporting period has also seen mounting polarisation and threats within Turkish-Dutch communities.

Salafism and radical Islamism

The manner in which some politicians speak publicly about the position of Islam and Salafism is fuelling fears among Muslims in the Netherlands that it is not only politically radical Islam that is in question, but rather Islam as a whole, as a religion and culture. The raids in September 2016 at two Salafist mosques in Utrecht and Tilburg – in connection with a criminal investigation into money laundering and suspicious financial flows from the Middle East – was portrayed by Salafists as evidence of hardening social attitudes towards Muslims in the Netherlands. Both Muslims and non-Muslims alike have started to wonder whether such actions will be confined to Salafist institutions, or if non-Salafist mosques and other institutions can also expect to be the subject of investigations. Salafists and radical Islamist movements are actively playing up to this kind of uncertainty among Muslims.

The far right and right-wing extremism

The decline in the number of asylum seekers has given right-wing extremists in the Netherlands less scope for action. During the period under review there were no incidents involving serious violence on the part of right-wing extremists, such as the firebombing of a mosque in Enschede in February 2016. However, asylum seekers' centres and the homes of recognised refugees have been subjected to acts of vandalism (including graffiti). It should be noted that the decrease in the number of protest actions does not mean that anti-refugee and anti-Muslim feeling in this country has disappeared – on the contrary. Hatred of Muslims, refugees and the Dutch political establishment is still very visible, especially online. There have also been a number of attention-grabbing incidents offline. The establishment of 'civilian patrols' by individuals with ties to the far right was mentioned in the previous assessment. During the period under review, a Dutch chapter of the Soldiers of Odin was founded. In July 2016 members of this so-called 'civilian patrol' pursued a refugee who was said to have harassed women in Winschoten. The threat of serious violence from the far right mainly comes from violent individuals who are not known to the authorities, as evidenced by the terrorist attack in Munich in July by an admirer of Anders Behring Breivik. In times of extreme social polarisation, violent individuals can feel emboldened to commit an act of (terrorist) violence.

Left-wing extremism and asylum rights extremism

Dutch asylum rights extremists continue to engage in protest actions against what they perceive as inhumane Dutch and European asylum policy. These actions focus mainly on detention and removal centres for failed asylum seekers in the Netherlands. It is important

to continue to take account of the possibility that asylum rights extremists will attempt to intimidate politicians, institutions and companies associated with asylum policy (and members of their staff). For example, during the period under review, the home of the director of the Repatriation and Departure Service (DT&V) was daubed with red paint.


Although public clashes between the far left and the far right are not as extreme here as they are in Germany, the phenomenon does seem to be increasingly common in the Netherlands. This is mainly due to the active role played by the far left. Over the past year their focus was on disrupting and breaking up demonstrations by the anti-Islam group Pegida Nederland, which often attracted right-wing extremists. In their counter-demonstrations, left-wing extremists often try to provoke violence, and are not afraid to use fireworks or smoke bombs to that end. Far-left anarchists and the group Anti-Fascistische Actie (Anti-Fascist Action; AFA) are concerned about 'racist police violence'. Messages calling on people to rise up against the police regularly appear online and on the street, especially in The Hague. Another striking development was the violent 'solidarity actions' by anarchists in response to the arrest of a Dutch anarchist on suspicion of involvement in bank robberies in Germany. Worryingly, the protesters stated online that they regarded the bank robberies as 'expropriation' and a 'politically legitimate means' for supporting anarchist acts and detained 'comrades'. Organised animal rights and environmental extremists have virtually no presence in the Netherlands, though there have been examples of (radical) activism in both these areas.

Tensions arising from developments in Turkey

After the failed coup in Turkey on 15 July 2016 by army elements, tensions have flared up not only between segments of society in Turkey, but also within the Turkish diaspora in the Netherlands. The aftermath of the coup has exacerbated polarisation in the Netherlands, leading to feelings of anxiety among certain groups and complicating the Netherlands' security situation. Concerns exist not only among Gülenists and AKP supporters, but also among Kurds, Armenians, Kemalists and Alevis in the Netherlands. In the period following the coup, instances of threatening behaviour, vandalism and, in one case, assault were reported to the Dutch authorities. Among nationalist Turks the critical response by European governments to the aftermath of the attempted coup has led to anti-Western sentiment. In most cases the tensions within Turkish-Dutch communities have not led to violence. Nevertheless, it is conceivable that tensions in the Netherlands could escalate as a result of events in Turkey. It is also important to bear in mind the existence of more long-term tensions between Turks and Kurds in this regard.

About the Terrorist Threat Assessment

The Netherlands employs a system of threat levels which indicate the probability of a terrorist attack. In order to establish the current threat level, the NCTV publishes a quarterly Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands (DTN). The DTN is a general analysis of both the national and international terrorist threat to the Netherlands, based on information by intelligence and security service and police, open source information, information from foreign counterparts and analyses by Dutch embassy personnel.



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