



National Coordinator for
Counterterrorism and Security
Ministry of Justice and Security

Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands 55

October 2021

Terrorist Threat Assessment Netherlands

Radicalisation - Extremism - Terrorism

1

2

3

4

5

Current threat level:
Significant

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Radicalisation – Extremism – Terrorism

October 2021

1. Threat level

On the basis of the 55th edition of the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands (DTN), the threat level has been set at 3. At present, there are individuals in the Netherlands who are becoming radicalised or who are already highly radicalised and could pose a threat to national security. The jihadist movement in the Netherlands remains a key element of this threat. This is demonstrated by various court cases and arrests, such as the arrests in Eindhoven on 23 September, that took place during the period covered by the current threat assessment. Currently, there are no concrete indications that individuals in the Netherlands are preparing an attack, though it is conceivable. It is also conceivable that an attack could be carried out by right-wing extremists. Yet the current threat, whether jihadist or right-wing extremist in nature, has not prompted a higher threat level.

The Dutch jihadist movement

The jihadist threat to the Netherlands remains unchanged and continues to constitute the main terrorist threat to the country. At present, the most conceivable terrorist scenario for the Netherlands is an act of jihadist violence carried out by a lone perpetrator or a small group. The jihadist movement is fragmented, both socially and ideologically. Due to internal division, a lack of initiative and an awareness of security risks, there is little sign of any mobilisation or growth within the movement. However, this does not mean that the threat posed by the movement has disappeared.

There are still dozens of people, both suspected and convicted jihadists, being held in the three dedicated terrorist wings of Dutch prisons. In 2022 various jihadists currently imprisoned in the Netherlands are expected to be released, including a number of men who took part in the fighting in Syria and Iraq. As reported in DTN⁵¹, it can be assumed that even after serving out their sentences, the majority of them will not have renounced the violent ideology of ISIS; moreover, this is a group of people who have experience with firearms, explosives and extreme forms of violence.

Right-wing terrorism

The conceivability of a right-wing extremist terrorist attack in the Netherlands is mainly tied to the involvement of young Dutch men in international online accelerationist networks. Accelerationism is a right-wing extremist ideology that is being spread via various (mostly non-public) social media platforms. Its adherents glorify and justify terrorist violence for the purpose of hastening the outbreak of a race war. Their aim in this regard is to create chaos in society so that the current political system can be replaced by a white (national socialist) ethnostate. A number of terrorist attacks inspired by this ideology has been carried out in Western countries over the past three years. In the Netherlands there are at least a few hundred Dutch people between the ages of 12 and 20 who spend much of their time online

as part of fluid international networks composed of several thousand people around the world. These young Dutch people often seem to struggle with psychosocial problems and a weak social safety net.

Attacks

The number of terrorist attacks in Europe in the first half of 2021 showed a downward trend in relation to 2020. In the period under review there were two attacks in Europe that could potentially be classified as having a jihadist or radical Islamic motive. These attacks were consistent with what has been seen in Europe in recent years: lone perpetrators, with a simple modus operandi, a limited number of victims and police officers as preferred targets.

Global jihadism

On a global scale there are developments ongoing in the jihadist movement that are relevant to the terrorist threat to the Netherlands. Over the past few years ISIS has transformed from an organisation focused primarily on the armed conflict in Iraq and Syria, into one that is increasingly turning its attention to waging global jihad. Sub-Saharan Africa has grown in importance to ISIS's global ambition. A further consolidation of the position of groups loyal to ISIS and al Qa'ida in Sub-Saharan Africa can lead to the establishment of jihadist safe havens there. The Taliban's assumption of power in Afghanistan could, in time, expand the breeding ground for terrorist organisations like al Qa'ida and increase their room to manoeuvre there. Given the Taliban's local focus, there is not as yet any direct threat to the Netherlands.

2. The threat to the Netherlands

Supporters of global jihadism still pose the greatest terrorist threat to the Netherlands. The inherent threat posed by jihadism to the Netherlands and Dutch interests remains unchanged since the previous DTN. Jihadists believe that they are engaged in a holy war against the perceived enemies of Islam. In their view, these enemies include Western society, of which the Netherlands is a part.

The Dutch jihadist movement

In the Dutch jihadist context it is difficult to predict who could eventually take the step of committing a violent act. This is further complicated by the fact that the nature of jihadist violence in Europe has shifted over the past five or six years, from large-scale attacks by multiple perpetrators to more improvised attacks by lone actors. Because these perpetrators generally prepare their attack alone using relatively simple means, such as a knife, there is less chance of catching them than if they operated as part of a group. It is partly for this reason that, in their propaganda, terrorist organisations like ISIS and al Qa'ida explicitly encourage individuals to carry out small-scale attacks.

In the Netherlands jihadist violence is currently most likely to be committed by lone actors or small groups, and the greatest threat is still posed by the followers of global jihadism. However, violent terrorist acts could still plausibly be committed by perpetrators operating in groups. Jihadists not only pose a concrete threat of violence; they can also contribute to the jihadist cause in a non-violent way, for example by disseminating propaganda online or raising funds.

In recent years the Dutch jihadist movement has had a more or less stable number of supporters. Since the sharp increase in numbers prior to 2018, the Dutch movement has had around 500 members. There are few people joining and leaving, which effectively leaves the size of the movement unchanged. Due to divisions and caution within the group, the movement is currently not expected to grow. It consists of various networks and like-minded individuals. In most cases the networks have little in the way of a hierarchy, and leadership and a clear division of roles are lacking. However, the movement does have a 'mainstream', in the form of a supraregional network of individuals and networks. Most overt jihadist activities in the Netherlands, both online and off, are related to this mainstream.

Government action in recent years has helped to reduce the jihadist movement's effectiveness. Prompted by their experiences of disruption of jihadist activities by the law enforcement authorities in recent years, the movement is highly aware of security risks for them. Jihadist activities, such as disseminating propaganda, therefore tend to be on a smaller

scale, more anonymous and less public. Furthermore, as referred to in previous DTNs, the jihadist landscape is still divided because supporters come from different ideological groups who tend to keep each other at arm's length. The jihadist movement currently lacks not only national or international issues that could unify adherents but also inspiring, charismatic leaders who could encourage the bridging of differences between the various groups at national level and thus spark a jihadist resurgence.

Less jihadist content online

Over the past two years the DTN has consistently devoted attention to online propaganda and the online jihadist movement in the Netherlands. The arrests in recent years of people involved in spreading ISIS propaganda online have likely contributed to the decreased visibility and dissemination of jihadist content within the Dutch movement. The removal of online propaganda by the authorities likely also contributes to this. Jihadist propaganda websites are frequently taken offline, as occurred in August this year. However, the undiminished importance of online propaganda for maintaining the jihadist movement means that jihadists will continue to be active online. See, for example, DTN52.

Arrests

On 23 September 2021 nine jihadists from Eindhoven were arrested on suspicion of preparing a terrorist offence, participating in a terrorist organisation, and taking part in and facilitating jihadist training. The suspects, aged between 18 and 31, sympathise with ISIS's ideology. The group is alleged to have regularly met to engage in physical training, watch violent jihadist videos and sing jihadist battle songs. The arrests took place after members of the group were said to have discussed plans for a targeted attack on a number of prominent Dutch politicians. No weapons were discovered during searches of homes. These arrests show that attacks perpetrated by the Dutch jihadist movement remain a real threat. In recent years the Dutch intelligence and security services have succeeded in identifying and preventing attacks coordinated within networks in time.

In April an 18-year-old man from Reuver was arrested on suspicion of preparing a terrorist attack. He participated in a chat group on Telegram in which instructions were shared for making explosives and bomb vests. A French woman arrested earlier that month on suspicion of planning to carry out a suicide attack was also a member of the chat group.

And that same month a 43-year-old Syrian man was arrested at the asylum seekers' centre in Sint Annaparochie on suspicion of years of involvement in terrorist activities by ISIS and other armed groups in Syria and Iraq.

Criminal cases and imprisonment

In the past few months there have been various jihadist and/or right-wing terrorist-related court cases, and in a few instances a hospital order (TBS) was also imposed. In these cases the court ruled that due to the suspects' psychosocial problems there was a very real likelihood of them reoffending if no additional treatment was given. Last April a 32-year-old man from Amsterdam was sentenced to five months in prison, with a suspended conditional hospital order, for threatening to carry out a terrorist attack during Pride in summer 2020. In another criminal case, The Hague District Court sentenced a woman from Uithoorn to six years in prison and imposed a hospital order with treatment in a secure institution for her role as the administrator of an ISIS propaganda channel on Telegram. This is the first time a Dutch woman has been given a substantial prison sentence for her militant role within the jihadist movement.

Partially suspended prison sentences were also imposed in a few other cases. In such instances the individuals in question are kept under supervision by the criminal justice authorities after their release and are required to abide by certain conditions during their probationary period. This was for example the case for the 19-year-old man who was sentenced to 12 months in juvenile detention on 13 October for threatening to commit a terrorist crime against writer Lale Gül. The man sent Gül ISIS videos and messages stating that she was officially on Sharia4Holland's blacklist and threatened an attack. A published report shows that this person was becoming radicalised. Another example is a woman from Gouda who was sentenced to three-and-a-half years in prison, of which one year suspended, for travelling to Syria in 2013 and later joining ISIS. The court imposed a heavy sentence because the woman had stayed with the group until the end.

In the first half of 2021 various asylees also appeared in court. Some of them were prosecuted for participating or even heading up jihadist armed groups, and also increasingly for war crimes as well. In most cases these were crimes committed abroad in the past, largely in Syria. However, there are also people with an asylum background who after arriving in the Netherlands continue to be involved in the activities of jihadist organisations in their country of origin. For example, in May 2021 a Libyan man from Vlaardingen was sentenced to four years in prison for being a member of the Libyan terrorist organisation Ansar al-Sharia. According to the Public Prosecution Service, the man had travelled to Libya from the Netherlands on several occasions and had contact with some of the organisation's high-ranking leaders. While in the Netherlands the man continued his involvement in the fight in his homeland.

To date there is little indication that asylum seekers or asylees suspected of taking part in terrorist organisations abroad pose a threat to the Netherlands. Their activities for jihadist groups appear to relate to and centre on the conflict in their country of origin.

Network formation

There are currently still dozens of suspected and convicted jihadists being held in the terrorist wings of the prisons in Vught, Rotterdam and Zwolle. Networking and mutual influencing take place in these wings, which can amplify the threat posed by imprisoned terrorists.

In 2022 various jihadists currently imprisoned in the Netherlands are expected to be released, including a number of men who took part in the fighting in Syria and Iraq. It can be assumed that the majority of returnees will not have distanced themselves from extremist and/or violent ideology even after having been in prison and will also have experience with weapons, explosives and extreme violence. However, it is too early to say if they will return to their old jihadist networks after their release or if they will still be prepared to carry out attacks.

For many years now the Dutch jihadist movement has been paying attention to the situation in the terrorist wings. This includes sharing the experiences of ‘brothers and sisters’ who were imprisoned there and organising protests to raise awareness of the plight of jihadists who are now behind bars. Members are also asked to provide moral support to jihadists who are still in prison. In May 2021 a prominent Dutch jihadist was sent away from the gate of the prison where he himself had spent several years in the terrorist wing.

Convicted terrorists residing unlawfully in the Netherlands

There is a growing group of people in the Netherlands who have had their Dutch nationality or residence status withdrawn after being convicted of terrorism or membership of a terrorist organisation. Some of these people are still imprisoned in a terrorist wing and will be released in the years ahead. Some have already been released. Withdrawal of Dutch citizenship or residence status interferes with deradicalisation and reintegration efforts by the local authorities and the security sector. This reduces the scope for action and makes it more difficult to keep track of people who have been convicted of terrorist offences. A ruling by the Council of State in April this year that undocumented Moroccans in most cases can no longer be held in immigration detention further reduces monitoring opportunities. The Council of State reached this judgment because there is no scope for expulsion within a reasonable timeframe as Morocco currently does not cooperate with forced return to its country. The fact that convicted Moroccan terrorists residing in the

Netherlands unlawfully can no longer be put in immigration detention means that there are now even fewer opportunities for keeping track of this group. This situation could potentially heighten the threat to national security. However, supervision in the form of immigration-law measures, such as a restraining order or an obligation to report periodically to the authorities, remains possible. Furthermore, some of these convicted terrorists choose to leave the Netherlands of their own accord.

Dutch jihadist travellers and returnees

In spring 2020 a ceasefire brokered by Turkey and Russia came into effect in northwest Syria. The situation for Dutch jihadist travellers has since changed very little. If fighting flares up again, it is likely that some of the male travellers will take up arms again and may be killed or fall into the hands of the Syrian regime.

Threat posed to national security by jihadist travellers

In recent years, jihadist travellers, who were previously in Syria and Iraq, have gradually returned to the Netherlands. The extent to which they pose a threat after their return varies from individual to individual. Key factors in this regard are gender, age, combat experience, duration of the stay abroad and the degree of ideological zeal. Some of the jihadist travellers still present in the region may eventually decide to return to the Netherlands. The majority of these travellers are Dutch nationals and therefore have right of entry to the Netherlands. The jihadist travellers currently in Syrian-Kurdish reception camps may gain more freedom of movement in the medium term. For example, the Kurdish authorities may suddenly decide to also release women jihadist travellers from the West (in addition to Syrian and Iraqi women). However, this has not yet happened. Furthermore, since mid-2019 women have succeeded in escaping from Syrian reception camps on a fairly regular basis. Some of these women will probably want to return to the Netherlands, while others will settle in the region. Some may also be killed in the fighting.

Some of the Dutch women who have already escaped from reception camps are eventually expected to report to a Dutch diplomatic mission, with Turkey being the most plausible option. In certain cases this will ultimately lead to controlled return.

The risks involved when jihadist travellers return to the Netherlands have been set out in several previous DTNs. Returnees pose a potential threat because they have spent a considerable amount of time with terrorist groups, have gained combat experience, have experienced or committed acts of extreme violence and have been immersed in violent jihadist ideology for a lengthy period. It is highly likely that some of those who return will remain faithful to this ideology, even after imprisonment. By travelling abroad some have

demonstrated that they are willing to actively fulfil their jihadist ideals. There are also risks to national security if Dutch jihadist travellers remain in prison or in reception camps in northeastern Syria. They may be released or escape and join or rejoin terrorist groups. As long as the Dutch jihadist travellers remain in the region they will not pose a direct threat to national security in the Netherlands. However, this may make it more difficult to keep track of their actions. Released travellers may return to the Netherlands, possibly without the knowledge of the authorities. However, as far as is known, this has not yet happened.

Minor children of Dutch jihadist travellers

The majority of children of Dutch jihadist travellers are very young, mostly born after their parents travelled abroad. Given their very young age, the likelihood of profound radicalisation and indoctrination as a result of their stay in a conflict zone and in reception camps is still limited. However, an extended stay could increase the threat posed by minor children.

For some time now, ISIS has been smuggling children out of the al-Hawl reception camp in northeastern Syria and taking them to Syria's Badiya desert for military training. This is an expansive area in eastern Syria west of the Euphrates where ISIS runs training camps and where it is able to move more freely than in other parts of Syria. It is possible that these trained youths will also be deployed for international attacks. For regrouping and recruitment purposes ISIS is focusing, among other things, on the potential offered by prisoners in northeastern Syria.

Threat from returnees: differences between men and women

In general, male jihadist travellers pose a greater threat of violence than their female counterparts because in jihadist ideology, engaging in combat – including carrying out attacks – is seen as primarily, though not exclusively, a male domain. Both male and female jihadist travellers can also contribute to the jihadist threat through non-violent means, such as deepening knowledge, creating and disseminating propaganda, connecting jihadist networks and fundraising.

Terrorist financing

There are various types of terrorist financing in the Netherlands. For example, the previously mentioned woman from Uithoorn was also convicted of violation of the Sanctions Act, as well for participation in a terrorist organisation, incitement to commit criminal offences, and war crimes. Alongside financing of jihadist organisations active in the combat zone in Syria and Iraq, parties in the Netherlands also fund other terrorist organisations. This year, a woman from Terneuzen, who was arrested in 2014 at the United States' request on suspicion of financing Al Shabaab, lost the interim injunction proceedings she had

initiated to prevent extradition to and a trial in the US. Terrorism is also financed through charities.

At the beginning of May, Germany banned the Islamic aid organisation Ansaar International. According to the German Federal Ministry of the Interior, alongside humanitarian causes, Ansaar International was also supporting terrorist organisations, including Jabhat al-Nusra (now part of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham), the Palestinian Hamas movement and the Somalian organisation Al Shabaab. One of the foundations affiliated with Ansaar International called on people to donate money via a Dutch bank account. The growth in digital banking means that, in recent years, it has become increasingly easy in the European Union to open bank accounts abroad. The example above shows that such accounts can be used to finance terrorism without the knowledge of one's own government.

Right-wing terrorism: the threat to the Netherlands posed by online accelerationist networks

The likelihood of a right-wing terrorist attack in the Netherlands is primarily based on the involvement of young Dutch men active in international online accelerationist networks. In March 2019 an attack was carried out on Muslims in Christchurch, New Zealand by a lone actor who felt a connection with the international right-wing extremist internet world. This and other incidents made it clear that a threat of violence also exists beyond the usual far-right organisations. The NCTV mentioned in previous DTNs that young, mostly troubled Dutch people may be attracted to the growing online right-wing extremist world. The right-wing extremist threat comes primarily from a new Dutch target group of at least a few hundred teenagers, adolescents and young adults aged between 12 and 20 who spend a considerable amount of time in international accelerationist networks. In its 2020 annual report, the Netherlands Defence Intelligence and Security Service (MIVD) noted that young right-wing extremists are attracted to working for the armed forces. International developments prompted the MIVD to intensify its investigation into right-wing extremism in 2020.

Another similarity besides their young age is the fact that many of these people appear to have psychosocial problems and lack a social safety net. This phenomenon is also being observed in other countries, such as the United Kingdom. The General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) estimates that the accelerationist movement globally has a few thousand members, including at least a few hundred Dutch people. Accelerationism is a right-wing extremist ideology that is being spread via various (mostly non-public) social media platforms. Its adherents glorify and justify terrorist violence for the purpose of hastening the outbreak of a race war. Their aim in this regard is to create chaos in society so that the current political system can be replaced by a white (national socialist) ethnostate.

This ideology has become an integral part of the right-extremist landscape and in the past two years it has played a part in a number of violent terrorist attacks or concrete plans for such attacks. Accelerationists probably aim mainly for small- to medium-scale attacks using such means as knives, firearms and explosives. Their targets include events, government members, Jewish and Muslim communities and critical infrastructure.

They have the ability to self-organise and encourage violence by small autonomous cells. This gives individual members of online networks freedom and makes an online network highly adaptive and resilient to interventions. The dozens of agitators who manage covert chat groups have a strong influence on the often violent discourse in the online discussions. The lack of hierarchy in the network means that the movement's agitators pose just as much of a terrorist threat as their followers.

Dutch accelerationists are largely active in international online accelerationist networks. The English-language discourse from the right-wing extremist accelerationist movement has little resonance in Dutch-language right-wing extremist chat groups.

Besides sharing terrorist plans, accelerationists also distribute messages of hate, amplify us-versus-them thinking and incite violence. This includes the online intimidation of opponents. In the first half of 2021 there were no arrests for terrorist offences inspired by right-wing extremist ideology. However, right-wing extremists were arrested for various reasons, including hate speech, incitement to commit criminal offences, threats and possession of firearms. The accelerationist threat to the Netherlands may increase in the short term due to the refined online recruitment of new members and intermingling with other online extremist networks.

The Base and the Netherlands

The fact that accelerationism is also gaining ground in the Netherlands is evidenced by two ongoing court cases against two young adults. In late October 2020 they were arrested in two separate cases on suspicion of 'right-wing extremist incitement to commit criminal offences, and offences with terrorist intent', and of participating in the American right-wing extremist and accelerationist organisation The Base.

This small offline organisation (with around 50 members) also has an online presence, which distinguishes it from the other networks described here that are primarily active online. The Base became more widely known in 2019 and 2020 when the FBI arrested 10 of its supporters. This dealt a significant blow to the organisation, not only because of the number of people arrested but also because one of them was a key leader. The Base is

classified as a terrorist organisation in the US, Canada and UK. The original leader and found Rinaldo Nazzaro is currently living in Russia, and from there he is still trying to recruit new members and incite terrorist acts.

3. Threat to the West

New attacks in Europe by lone perpetrators

The number of terrorist attacks in Europe in the first half of 2021 showed a downward trend in relation to 2020. In the period under review there were two attacks in Europe that could potentially be classified as jihadist or radical Islamic, though it will take further police investigation to be certain. The attacks both occurred in France. On 23 April a police officer was stabbed to death with a knife at a police station in Rambouillet. According to the French prosecutors, the perpetrator had become radicalised and also had personality disorders. The man, who suffered from depression (according to his father), was shot dead at the scene by a police officer. A month later, on 28 May, another attack occurred in La Chapelle-sur-Erdre near Nantes. Here a police officer was stabbed to death by a man. The assailant was a habitual offender who had become radicalised in prison and suffered from schizophrenia. He was also on the authorities' radar on account of his radical ideology. Scientific research has shown that psychological disorders are relatively more common among lone actors than among terrorists operating within groups.

These attacks were consistent with what has been seen in Europe in recent years: lone perpetrators, with a simple *modus operandi*, a limited number of victims and – in the case of radical Islamic or jihadist motives – police officers as preferred targets. There is no evidence that other people or jihadist organisations were involved in the two attacks described above. The fact that such acts of violence are prepared and carried out by single individuals acting alone makes it difficult for government authorities to detect potential attackers of this kind at an early stage. However, the threat does not come only from lone actors. In February 2021, a cell was shut down in Denmark and Germany thanks to cooperation between European security services. Although organisations like ISIS and Al Qa'ida still intend to carry out attacks in Europe, it is doubtful as to whether they have the capacity to do so at present. This is expected to remain the picture for Europe for the time being.

Possible intermingling of right-wing extremism and anti-government extremism

In various European countries there is a certain amount of intermingling between right-wing extremist ideology and anti-government sentiment. In Germany, for example, right-wing extremists have been joining COVID-19 protests for some time now. In May a member of the Belgian armed forces threatened a prominent virologist because of the COVID-19 restrictions imposed by the Belgian government. The man, who was already on the radar of the Belgian defence intelligence service due to his right-wing extremist sympathies, is alleged to have been plotting an attack on the virologist. It is interesting to note that during the search for the heavily armed, now deceased soldier, thousands of people in both Belgium and the Netherlands expressed support for him.

Another example is a case in Austria where in mid-May the police raided homes of opponents of the COVID-19 measures and seized firearms, ammunition and swords. According to the Federal Ministry of the Interior, the group was planning to attack police officers at a demonstration against Austria's COVID-19 policy. In an online chat group they are said to have discussed the use of nail bombs and Molotov cocktails. The suspects may also be neo-Nazis, and the authorities are investigating whether the ban on neo-Nazi activities was violated.

Left-wing extremism on the rise in Germany

In many countries surrounding the Netherlands left-wing extremism is on the rise. The German intelligence service (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz: BfV) has reported that left-wing extremist and anarchist incidents are becoming more violent and more professional. Whereas until recently left-wing extremists focused primarily on staging demonstrations, they are now increasingly organising themselves into small-scale cells that use violence against the police and state institutions. They are also increasingly targeting right-wing or far-right sympathisers. Notable in this regard are attacks on critical infrastructure and arson attacks on businesses. An arson attack by anarchists in Munich on 21 May resulted in a power outage that affected 20,000 homes, many shops and municipal services. In June the German police arrested two people they suspected of starting the fire. Possible contacts with Dutch left-wing extremists are currently being investigated; such links may lead to a hardening of the far-left scene in the Netherlands, which is generally lawful in its activism (see chapter 5).

4. International developments

ISIS

ISIS still regularly carries out attacks in Iraq and Syria. At the same time, over the past few years ISIS has transformed from an organisation focused primarily on the armed conflict in Iraq and Syria into one that is increasingly focused on waging global jihad.

Turkey remains important to ISIS

It has been known for some time that ISIS has facilitation networks in Turkey (see for example DTN52). Although the Turkish authorities have arrested various ISIS members in recent months, including for the abduction of a 7-year-old Yezidi girl, ISIS activities are still being organised from Turkey. According to the US Department of the Treasury, money continues to flow to ISIS in Syria and Iraq from ISIS cells in Turkey.

Al Qa'ida

Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) forms the de facto government in Idlib province in northwestern Syria. HTS used to be the Al Qa'ida unit in Syria (under the name Jabhat al-Nusra), and it is therefore still often considered to be part of Al Qa'ida. However, HTS is trying to rid itself of that label and thereby remove itself from the international sanctions list.

It is unlikely that the Al Qa'ida core itself is preparing attacks on the West. It is more plausible that it would use allied networks and organisations, such as Al Qa'ida in Syria, Al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and Al Shabaab.

Concerns about resurgence in jihadist terrorism in Afghanistan following the Taliban's assumption of power

Following a rapid military advance in August 2021, the radical Islamic Taliban assumed power in Afghanistan and proclaimed the 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan'. The narrative that the West, and primarily the United States, was defeated by a radical Islamic force is being widely propagandised on social media by various parties, most of which are affiliated with Al Qa'ida. As-Sahab, the Al Qaida core's media organisation, is calling on Muslims to follow the Taliban's example and take up arms against the West.

It is not yet known what the Taliban's position is on potential terrorist activities on Afghan territory. Formally, the group must abide by the Doha Agreement, which states that Afghanistan must not be used as a base for terrorist groups. Furthermore, providing scope for terrorist groups would also damage the legitimacy, stability and security of the Taliban regime. At the same time, the Taliban have never distanced themselves from Al Qa'ida and its ideology, long-term goals and terrorist activities. If the Taliban were to allow terrorist activities in Afghanistan, this could eventually affect the terrorist threat to the West, including the Netherlands, in several ways.

Al Qa'ida could bolster its presence in Afghanistan and expand its capabilities. The ties between the Taliban and Al Qa'ida have always been strong. There are still around 500 Al Qa'ida fighters in Afghanistan, and the leader of the Al Qa'ida core, Ayman al-Zawahiri, is thought to be in the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan. It is unlikely that the Taliban are going to offer special latitude to the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), which has been active in Afghanistan since 2014. This is because the Taliban and ISKP are staunch enemies on an ideological and personnel level and pursue different goals. ISKP's bloody attack on Kabul Airport on 26 August reiterated the fact the ISKP is a formidable opponent of the Taliban. Since its inception, ISKP has had a regional focus and has so far not shown any international terrorist ambitions.

Internationally, the main question being asked in the media is whether Afghanistan could become a jihadist safe haven that could attract jihadist travellers from the West, including the Netherlands. The NCTV estimates that this could eventually become a risk but does not expect large numbers of Dutch people to travel there. Firstly, the Dutch jihadist movement is fragmented and lacks charismatic leaders, which means that it is probably unable to mobilise large numbers of sympathisers to join jihadist groups in Afghanistan at this time. Furthermore, Al Qa'ida currently only has a limited presence in Afghanistan, and building a network takes time. Afghanistan is also less important than Syria and Iraq on a religious level: according to certain Islamic traditions, the decisive battle that will usher in the end of time will take place in Syria. Practical considerations also play a role. Syria was easily accessible from Turkey. The capture of the international airports will have an impact on the accessibility of Afghanistan's major cities. But even from the cities it is a challenge to link up with Al Qa'ida networks, which tend to hide out in mountainous regions. Finally, unlike in Syria there is no enemy regime to be fought in Afghanistan.

Although many European countries are encouraging the reception of Afghan refugees in the region, the number of refugees coming to the EU is likely to grow in the months ahead. A large and varied refugee population may contain people with a violent background. It appears unlikely at present that terrorist organisations will exploit the flow of refugees (for example for carrying out attacks), as it did in 2014-2015.

Sub-Saharan Africa: jihadism in the periphery

In recent years Africa has acquired a more prominent place in ISIS's global ambitions, with Sub-Saharan Africa becoming the centre of gravity of its presence on the continent. Over the past few years African groups loyal to ISIS have come to have a far greater share in the number of attacks claimed by ISIS worldwide. The intensified focus on Africa was also mentioned in an audio message issued by ISIS in June, in which ISIS fighters in West and

Central Africa received particular praise. Besides ISIS, Al Qa'ida is also represented by 'branches' in Sub-Saharan Africa (in Somalia and the Sahel) and these regions too have become more important to Al Qa'ida in recent years. They also contribute to the image of growing success among jihadist groups in Sub-Saharan Africa, which pose regional threats on account of their insurgencies against local regimes. Western interests in the region run a risk of being affected as well.

The jihadist groups in Sub-Saharan Africa loyal to ISIS and Al Qa'ida focus primarily on local or regional targets. These relatively autonomous groups are mainly influenced by local issues and circumstances. If they succeed in further consolidating their position in the regions in question and gaining greater territorial control, jihadist safe havens may emerge. Such enclaves could potentially pose a new kind of threat because they could enable the planning of external, cross-regional attacks in the West in line with the vision of the parent organisations. To date only Al Shabaab, a Somalian-based 'branch' of Al Qa'ida, has expressed its intention to do so; it is currently unlikely that other groups in Sub-Saharan Africa have the same intentions.

A good example of how not only Western but also specifically Dutch interests in the region can be affected was the large-scale jihadist attack by ISIS Mozambique in late March 2021 in that gas-rich country. During the attack fighters operating under the banner of ISIS's Central Africa Province stormed the northern coastal town of Palma, close to where the French oil and gas company Total was working on a gas project. Following the attack, which also claimed the lives of two Western expats, Total decided to suspend the gas project indefinitely and canceled contracts for reasons of force majeure. This also affects the Netherlands: as well as losing economic activity, Dutch companies that are active in the area and involved in the gas project, risk losing money on various investments. The Netherlands' treasury may also be adversely affected because the government has issued a guarantee of almost €1 billion to one of the companies.

5. Extremism, radicalisation and polarisation

Marginal right-wing extremist organisations and young ‘seekers’

The Dutch far-right and right-wing extremist movement has two faces. On the one hand, the usual far-right groups still lead a relatively marginal existence without charismatic leaders. For many years far-right and right-wing extremist organisations have been seeking to connect with current social issues and join protests. Although they generally do not attract many supporters, in the past year there has been a certain amount of intermingling between right-wing extremist ideology and other anti-government sentiment in the context of COVID-19 protests. Some people are attempting to operate under the radar. And certain individuals on the far right want to establish an international network with like-minded people in Germany, Eastern Europe and Scandinavia.

On the other hand, in their search for camaraderie and an ideological message, young people in the right-wing extremist scene no longer find their way to the usual Dutch groups but instead look to the internet. By no means do all Dutch right-wing extremist youths tend toward terrorism. The English-language discourse from the right-wing extremist accelerationist movement (see chapter 2) has little resonance in Dutch-language right-wing extremist chat groups. The Dutch-language groups are primarily neo-Nazi groups which glorify Hitler and the Holocaust. Some of these young people stand out by virtue of their great dedication. They are not only active online but also purchase items to display in real life, such as flags, uniforms and other far-right paraphernalia. Some young people are susceptible to the sense of purpose and social environment offered by these online groups. Online networks have an important social function, often leading to virtual or real-life friendships and a sense of purpose in life. Besides the fact that some of these people are mainly looking for a social outlet, the lack of large right-wing extremist organisations with appealing leaders in the Netherlands over the years has contributed to the fact that the Netherlands has no tradition of right-wing terrorist violence. However, because young people are active in the international online right-wing extremist world, accelerationism has been embraced in the Netherlands, albeit to a limited extent, as explained in chapter 2. In the Dutch-language online groups the threshold for discussing violence is low. This could lead to a further hardening of the scene, intimidation or violent acts by lone actors or small groups. In the case of accelerationists it could lead to terrorism, as reported in chapter 2.

On the far left, lawful activism prevails over extremism

Compared with other European countries, far-left protest in the Netherlands is primarily lawful in nature. The same applies to the Dutch animal rights movement. Various far-left groups, including anarchists, join international campaigns or show solidarity in the case of specific events, such as the demolition of social housing. In the Netherlands, international campaigns against European immigration policy result mainly in demonstrations or putting

up posters. It is noteworthy that climate protest groups in the Netherlands sometimes join peaceful demonstrations by anarchists.

In the margins of the protest, some far-left groups are beginning to drift away from lawful activism in both their words and their actions. They speak openly of a militant fight against the State and against capitalism. An anarchist group (wrongly) claimed a number of small-scale attacks in the past year. Despite the limited enthusiasm in the Netherlands for small-scale attacks, which generally result in no more than minor damage to property, they could signal the start of new extremist activity. It is possible that left-wing extremists may feed off the dissatisfaction at the government that prevails among certain sections of the population, fuelled by developments such as the childcare benefits scandal, the delayed economic impact of COVID-19 and the right-wing visibility at COVID-19 protests and in politics.

Fragmentation and intermingling at COVID-19 protests

There have been two general developments with regard to coronavirus-related protests. On the one hand, with the relaxation of coronavirus measures in June, the number of demonstrations against these measures has declined. But on the other hand, there is a risk that a segment of the movement's uncompromising undercurrent is becoming more radicalised. Within a permissive context in which the social threshold for discussing and committing unlawful acts has become lower, violent incidents continue to occur. In late March a man was arrested for planning a attack with a firework bomb on a vaccination centre in Den Helder. The man was subsequently acquitted on 15 October. This was in part due to the fact that the charge specified that he had made his plans with terrorist intent. However, the court held that this had not been proven. In recent months, incidents have also taken place in other towns and cities in which improvised explosives and Molotov cocktails were discovered at COVID-19 test centres. Incidents of this kind are consistent with a wider trend: according to the police and the Public Prosecution Service, the number of investigations into homemade explosives have tripled since the start of the pandemic. 'Defend groups' are also notably active around the protests. These are anti-government groups with possible far-right influences which regard criminal damage, defamation, criminal incitement and violence against the police as legitimate. Members of such groups also expressed sympathy for the fugitive Belgian soldier (see chapter 3).

The harsh online tone of certain conspiracy theorists has led to a number of court cases. These cases have demonstrated that conspiracy theories can contribute to the dehumanisation of people with different beliefs and the rejection of democratic principles, based on a uncompromisingly polarised, us-versus-them view of the world. This fosters a hardening of

the movement. One of the instigators of a conspiracy regarding the alleged involvement of prominent figures in the government's COVID-19 policy in a Satanic paedophile network was sentenced to nine months in prison, of which three months suspended, for incitement to commit criminal offences and threatening behaviour. A number of his followers on social media and a sympathiser were also sentenced for incitement and threatening the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM).

In various European countries there is a certain amount of slippage between right-wing extremist ideology and anti-government sentiment. Right-wing extremists often join protests, appear on YouTube channels set up to vent social dissatisfaction, or maintain online connections with conspiracy theorists. Conversely, some instigators of COVID-19 protests, which tend to attract participants of various ideological stripes, regularly seek out the far right. Ideas are exchanged, with the far right often having answers to socioeconomic and cultural questions, as well as questions about sense of purpose. Having a sense of purpose is a particularly appealing prospect for people who experience discontent.

Inspired by a combination of us-versus-them thinking, conspiracy theories, a rejection of the democratic legal order, and in some cases right-wing extremist ideology, the radical undercurrent of COVID-19 protest can brand its opponents as enemies, against whom extra-legal punishment and violence are justified. This could lead to isolation. Now that COVID-19 protests are dying down, part of the harder undercurrent remains. These people see their own world views confirmed time and again in closed online echo chambers. Even when the last of the COVID-19 measures are eventually lifted, this undercurrent may continue to oppose the government, media and science, both in its words and in its actions. However, it remains to be seen whether cohesion can be maintained between those who came together during the pandemic through their shared aversion to the government when they no longer have a common cause.

Polarisation

The DTN addresses negative forms of polarisation because these can contribute to social unrest and/or fuel radicalisation processes. The issues described below have sparked protests or polarised debate which is leading to a hardening of attitudes, both in the digital domain and the physical world.

Following the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in May, pro-Palestinian protests were held at various locations in the Netherlands, as had previous been done in 2014. During the protests anti-Semitic slogans were chanted and caliphate flags were waved. The demonstrations' organisers and participants were from a mix of backgrounds and included

traditional actors, groups from the Dutch-Palestinian community, left-wing groups and people from online initiatives whose ideological background is more difficult to ascertain.

Because emotions were running high, especially on the pro-Palestinian side, there was a risk that a lone actor or small groups would commit radical or unlawful acts, possibly focusing on Jewish targets. A concrete example of this was the vandalising of a Jewish monument in Cuijk. The pro-Palestinian protests in the Netherlands stopped when Israel and Hamas agreed to a ceasefire on 20 May. Given this breeding ground for tensions, a new escalation between Israel and Palestinian groups could conceivably lead to a flare-up of such incidents in the Netherlands.

Salafism and informal teaching institutions

Salafism is a fundamentalist reform moment within Islam that sees the first three generations of Muslims as ideal models for human behaviour and advocates a literal interpretation of scripture. Salafists see it as their duty to purge the Islamic community of things they consider un-Islamic.

Salafism as an ideology is not problematic in itself, but incitement by agitators that can lead to undesirable behaviour is. In absolute terms, Salafist agitators are in the minority in the Netherlands, but their influence is disproportionately large. Those preaching a moderate message may find themselves 'driven out of the market' by the effects of this influence. In extreme cases, Salafist agitators could compel others to actively hate those with beliefs different to their own and reject the rule of law, creating a real danger that Muslims at large will be prevented from participating fully in our democratic society under pressure from these agitators.

Problematic behaviour by anti-democratic, intolerant and anti-integrationist elements within the Salafist movement could eventually lead to societal polarisation and the undermining of the democratic legal order.

Since spring 2018, Salafist agitators have been engaged in intensive and persistent efforts when it comes to informal teaching. Over the past two years they have strengthened, expanded and professionalised their infrastructure in this area. Informal lessons are funded through their own circles as well as from abroad.

The number of students at the existing Salafist informal teaching institutions has grown steadily in recent years. The classes offered by Salafist agitators garner a great deal of interest and exert a strong appeal. The non-Salafist community does not appear to be offering an alternative to this type of instruction. The lack of lessons from other Islamic groups means

that the Salafist movement has a disproportionate influence on the Muslim community.

Although Salafist informal lessons do not usually incite hatred in criminal terms, these classes can have a problematic and polarising effect.

This is because Salafism has certain distinctive ideas that can lead to polarisation and intolerance and serve as a breeding ground for radicalisation.

It offers a black-and-white conception of Islam, denouncing anything that is inconsistent with this thinking. This includes, for example, gays and lesbians, non-believers, Christians, Jews and other Muslim denominations.

The establishment of Salafist-based informal Islamic teaching institutions is consistent with the trend of increasing institutionalisation of the Salafist community whereby believers can rely on their own organisations in as many aspects of life as possible. The fear is that this institutionalisation may lead to social compartmentalisation, segregation and isolationism.

About the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands

The Netherlands uses a system of threat levels that indicate the likelihood of a terrorist attack. The National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (NCTV) publishes the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands (DTN) three times a year. The DTN presents a broad analysis of the threat to the Netherlands posed by domestic and international terrorism. The DTN is based on information from the intelligence and security services, the police, public sources and foreign partners, and on analyses by embassy staff.

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