



National Coordinator for
Counterterrorism and Security
Ministry of Justice and Security

Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands 56

April 2022

Terrorist Threat Assessment Netherlands

Radicalisation - Extremism - Terrorism

1

2

3

4

5

Current threat level:
Significant

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1. Threat level

The threat level remains at 'significant' (level 3 on a scale of 1-5), which means that a terrorist attack in the Netherlands is conceivable, but that there are no specific indications that such an attack is imminent. Supporters of jihadism pose the greatest terrorist threat to the Netherlands, although Dutch jihadists have little if any public presence. Vigilance is also necessary with regard to accelerationist circles, as some young adherents to this belief system may pose a threat. There are also indications of further radicalisation within the radical undercurrent of the movement opposing the government's coronavirus measures. In this context the violent threat to this country is posed primarily by individuals and small groups who are susceptible to subversive conspiracy theories they encounter, whether online or in the physical world.

The jihadist movement in the Netherlands

Over the past two years the jihadist movement in the Netherlands has become largely inward-looking. In recent years there have been fewer and fewer public expressions of jihadist ideology, whether online or in the physical world. Most jihadists in the Netherlands are part of offline networks. A small group is radicalising online, distinct from the offline networks. They take their inspiration from the propaganda put out by ISIS, which continues to call on its supporters via official and non-official media channels to carry out attacks independently.

International jihadism

The threat posed by the jihadist movement in Europe has been relatively stable for some time. The threat in Europe is mainly constituted by lone perpetrators and small groups or cells, which are separate from ISIS but are inspired by it and/or its ideology. The means of attack used are usually relatively simple. The number of jihadist attacks in Europe in 2021 (5) was significantly lower than in 2020 (16).

ISIS and al Qa'ida are still seeking to carry out attacks in Europe from their home bases in the Middle East, but it is doubtful they currently have the capacity to do so. The ISIS attack on a prison in northeastern Syria on 20 January 2022 demonstrated that the organisation was still capable of carrying out a complex operation in its 'core territory' (Syria and Iraq).

ISIS did however suffer a setback, with the death of its leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Qurayshi, as a result of a US military operation. In early March ISIS presented its new leader, about whom little is currently known.

Jihadist activities in Afghanistan and in Africa mainly have a regional impact, though Western targets in those parts of the world can be affected. For the time being, these jihadists do not appear to be focusing on carrying out attacks in the West.

Right-wing extremism

Accelerationism is the ideology that poses the greatest violent threat within right-wing extremism. A few hundred Dutch accelerationists have come to the attention of the authorities online; some of them may pose a threat. A fascination with weapons has been noted in several of this movement's online networks. There are concerns that individuals with this ideological background intend to join the armed forces or shooting clubs in order to gain experience with firearms. The war in Ukraine may hold some appeal for Dutch right-wing extremists, but as yet they have shown little interest in travelling to Ukraine and joining right-wing extremist groups on either the Ukrainian or the Russian side.

Anti-government extremism

In the Netherlands, discontent about coronavirus measures mostly took the form of activities undertaken by a law-abiding mainstream and a radical undercurrent. Certain utterances by public figures may give individuals in this radical undercurrent a sense of being heard and legitimated in their radical behaviour. A small number of individuals contributing to the political discourse have employed a radical COVID-19 narrative involving various conspiracy theories. Virologists have indicated that there is still a risk of new coronavirus variants emerging, meaning there may be a resurgence of actions by the radical undercurrent if restrictive measures are reintroduced. Agitators and conspiracy theorists are also likely to shift their focus to other issues in society on which they oppose the government. The war in Ukraine could serve to mobilise people, though it is unlikely to elicit the level of public protest associated with the COVID-19 measures.

2. Jihadism and the threat posed by radical Islam

The jihadist movement in the Netherlands remains stable

Supporters of jihadism constitute a key element of the terrorist threat to the Netherlands, although Dutch jihadists have little if any public presence. Religious-inspired violence is an integral part of this movement's ideology. The ideology of the armed jihadist group ISIS remains the primary source of inspiration for Dutch jihadist networks, though since the fall of the 'caliphate' there has been more scope for criticism of the group's actions. Various regional jihadist networks remain active in the Netherlands, concentrated in a number of major cities. These networks are connected to one another, to a greater or lesser degree, by a super-regional network of active supporters. One example of a potential regional network may be seen in the nine suspects arrested in Eindhoven in September 2021 for preparing and/or promoting terrorist offences or taking part in terrorist training. The trial is still ongoing.

As noted in previous editions of the DTN, the Dutch jihadist movement as a whole is currently regarded as relatively stable in size, but ideologically divided. The movement has become largely inward looking, and its public presence, both online and off, has declined in recent years, thanks in part to government intervention. As a result the jihadist message has less reach than it once did. In addition, the movement appears to be ageing, and it has not been able to recruit significant numbers of new members.

Jihadists continue to express their ideology in a variety of ways. Through da'wa they seek to attract new followers, mostly among like-minded individuals and relatives and acquaintances of existing members. The movement's members continue to highlight certain mobilising issues, such as the position of women in detention camps in northeastern Syria, but they seem to offering little if any tangible support. The temporary relaxation of COVID-19 measures led to a resumption of contacts between Dutch jihadists and Belgian networks. Despite the fact that Dutch jihadists are maintaining a low public profile, a number of them did protest openly against the revocation of Dutch nationality of people convicted of terrorist offences. In March 2021 a jihadist from Maastricht made the news with a letter about the revocation of his Dutch nationality. A Hague-based jihadist who was convicted in the 'Context' case also sought media attention after being informed by the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) that his nationality would be revoked.

Small group of jihadists radicalising online

A small number of people are radicalising through the internet, independent of any real-world networks. These are mainly young people who come into contact with one another in largely private international chatrooms. They take their inspiration from the propaganda put out by ISIS, which uses both official and non-official media channels to call on its supporters in Europe to carry out attacks independently. Some of them go on to form real-world networks in addition to the online networks of which they are a part. This trend exhibits certain parallels to what has been observed among accelerationists, whereby young people (in this case, those with right-wing extremist tendencies) are radicalised online in relative isolation via international networks.

Ongoing security risks posed by possible return of Dutch jihadist travellers

Since July 2021 two men and six women have returned to the Netherlands from the conflict zone in Syria and Iraq. In February 2022 the Netherlands brought back five ISIS women and their 11 children to this country from northwestern Syria. This decision was made so as to ensure that their criminal cases would not be terminated. If this were to happen, the suspects in question would suffer no penalty and be released after returning to the Netherlands.

With more individuals returning to the Netherlands, the number of Dutch jihadist travellers living in freedom in this country – having been released from prison in the Netherlands (or in some cases, in Iraq or Syria) – is expected to increase in the years ahead. Male returnees pose a potential threat, on account of their combat training and experience. In general, the threat posed by women is considered to be lower because they lack combat experience, and their role within jihadist networks differs from that of men. Nevertheless, given their experiences in conflict zones, their relationship with ISIS, their ideological knowledge and their international contacts, female returnees could potentially give the Dutch jihadist movement a boost, by way of networking and support activities.

Dutch minors held in Syrian Kurdish reception camps are primarily victims of choices made by their parents and the situation in which they find themselves. These children are generally still young, and the likelihood of profound radicalisation and indoctrination as a result of their stay in the conflict zone and reception camps is still very limited. The question of whether these children pose a threat – and if so, to what extent – will differ from child to child and can only be ascertained after they have been examined and screened by experts. Extended stays in reception camps heightens the risk of trauma and indoctrination. Over time this could increase the potential threat they pose to national security in the Netherlands.

Jihadist travellers in Syria, both men and women, can also pose a threat. This may be either non-violent (e.g. spreading jihadist doctrine in the Netherlands) or violent (e.g. encouraging attacks). However, from within the Netherlands they can have a greater reach and a more direct influence on the Dutch jihadist movement, and consequently the non-violent threat to national security posed by both men and women is greater after they have returned to this country. Male returnees in particular may pose a greater violent threat to the Netherlands. After all, Dutch targets are easier to strike at from within the country than from abroad.

Radicalisation in regular prisons very limited

Special terrorist wings were created in Dutch prisons in 2006 in response to jihadists' missionary fervour, so as to prevent individuals suspected or convicted of terrorist offences from radicalising ordinary prisoners. An analysis by the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) shows that the terrorist wings have been successful in this regard: there are very few indications that extremist ideas are circulating among ordinary prisoners. In cases where it was decided not to place jihadists in a terrorist wing (for example, in order to prevent network formation), there is no evidence they have attempted to radicalise other prisoners. There are also no known indications of this occurring when jihadists were transferred from the terrorist wing to the general population in the final year of their sentence. However, there have been a few instances in which a small number of jihadists in justice-system institutions with a more vulnerable population (such as youth detention centres or forensic care institutions) have attempted to influence their fellow detainees on matters of religion.

Risk of reoffending among convicted terrorists

In 2022 a number of individuals convicted of terrorist offences are due to be released from prison, including several men and women convicted of travelling to Syria and Iraq to wage jihad. Most individuals convicted of a terrorist offence are held in special terrorist wings. There is a risk that individuals held in terrorist wings could make new contacts in prison and thus be drawn into a new terrorist network. The authorities are alert to this risk. Although many of the released prisoners will in all likelihood not make new plans to commit terrorist crimes, a small number will probably pose a heightened threat after their release.

Various research studies have concluded that reoffending is relatively limited among individuals convicted of terrorist offences after their release from prison. Of the 180 people who have been held in terrorist wings since they were first created in 2006, just 5% were subsequently convicted of a terrorist offence. While reoffending rates for this type of prisoner may be much lower than those associated with regular criminals, the nature of terrorist offences is generally far more serious than that of 'ordinary' crimes and their societal impact is consequently much greater. It is also not clear to what extent these former prisoners have managed to extricate themselves from their extremist networks. As part of the jihadist movement, they can attract new recruits or induce others to commit a terrorist offence. In that sense these individuals continue to pose a terrorist threat. An example of someone who continued to exert influence even after their conviction and release is a former member of the Hofstad group. In mid-December 2021 he was back in court on suspicion of funding the escape of a number of Dutch ISIS women from camps in Syria.

Hawala banking used for terrorist ends

In mid-November 2021 The Hague Court of Appeal upheld the conviction of a man of Syrian origin on charges that included illegal banking and terrorist financing. The man had used *hawala* banking for this purpose. This is a form of informal banking in which financial transactions take place via payments to intermediaries, so that no money is actually transferred from the payer to the recipient. In addition to carrying out transactions on behalf of others, the man also sent large sums to Syria himself, which were intended for his brother, who was active there as a fighter with jihadist groups.

Hawala banking is on the rise due to the strict oversight and monitoring of regular banks and financial institutions in order to combat money laundering and terrorist financing. In the *hawala* system there is a certain intermingling between financial flows from criminal and from terrorist sources. This was the case with a *hawala* network that was shut down in Germany in October 2021. The network consisted of 67 people, including 44 Syrians. Since 2016 it had allegedly transferred at least €140 million originating from the drug trade, theft and other forms of large-scale crime to places like Syria and Turkey via Germany and the Netherlands. The members of the network included various individuals with ties to terrorist groups. According to the German authorities, these arrests have cut off a lucrative source of funding for terrorist activities.

Situation involving Salafism in the Netherlands remains unchanged

The situation involving Salafism in the Netherlands has not changed in the period under review. Salafism is a fundamentalist reform movement 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. Salafist agitators in the Netherlands are limited in number, but their influence is disproportionately large. Problematic behaviour by anti-democratic, intolerant and anti-integrationist elements within the Salafist movement could lead to societal polarisation and eventually to the subversion of the democratic legal order.

International developments related to the jihadist threat

Over time, developments abroad can influence the threat situation in the Netherlands. Western targets, including Dutch targets, could also be attacked in the region in question. This is why the DTN has always included an analysis of international trends relating to radicalisation, international attacks and global jihadist organisations like ISIS and al Qa'ida.

Jihadist threat in Europe posed primarily by lone individuals and small cells

The threat posed by the jihadist movement in Europe has been relatively stable for some time. This threat emanates mainly from lone perpetrators and small groups or cells, which are separate from ISIS but are inspired by the organisation, its ideology and followers. Perpetrators generally use

relatively simple methods to carry out attacks. In some cases attackers were found to have psychological problems and/or unclear motives. Such attacks are also conceivable in the Netherlands. The number of jihadist attacks in Europe in 2021 (5) was significantly lower than in 2020 (16).¹ Thanks to arrests in France and Germany in the autumn of 2021, the authorities were able to thwart attacks by jihadist cells. In addition, the Belgian police arrested 13 people in Antwerp on 8 February 2022 for disseminating jihadist propaganda and for possible terrorist financing. These 13 individuals are not thought to have had any plans for an attack.

In their propaganda, media organisations linked to ISIS continue to call for attacks on the West. From their 'heartland' in the Middle East, ISIS and al Qa'ida are still seeking to commit attacks in Europe, but it is doubtful whether they currently have the capacity to do so.

The attacks that occurred in the United Kingdom in the second half of 2021 were notable with regard to the targets involved. On 15 October 2021 a 25-year-old British man of Somali origin man killed the British Conservative MP David Amess while the latter was meeting with members of his constituency in a church. The perpetrator, who was a supporter of ISIS, stated that he killed Amess because of his political support for the bombing of ISIS targets in Syria. The killer was not on the radar of the security services, though he had previously been a participant in a government de-radicalisation programme. His choice of target – a politician – once again highlights the danger politicians can face in performing their duties. This is perhaps more true for the UK than for other European countries, given the many public events held in constituencies there. A few weeks later another attack was carried out in the UK, this time at a Liverpool hospital, by a Syrian refugee using a homemade explosive. His motive is as yet unclear. Nevertheless, after the attack the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) raised the threat level for the UK to 'severe' because these kinds of incidents may inspire copycats. This makes the UK the only country in Europe to raise its threat level in the past year.

1 The 2021 attacks were as follows: Rambouillet (23 April), Chapelle-sur-Erdre (28 May), Würzburg (25 June), Kongsberg in Norway (13 October) and Southend-on-Sea (15 October).

Hostage-taker in US synagogue sought to secure the release of female jihadist terrorist

A jihadist hostage-taking at a synagogue in Colleyville, Texas in January 2022 was striking in terms of both the perpetrator's modus operandi and his purported aim. A 44-year-old British national took a rabbi and three others hostage. Thus far, it appears that he acted alone. He had arrived in the US just a few weeks before, and during that time he bought weapons. According to his brother, the perpetrator had psychological problems. His aim in taking hostages was to secure the release of the Pakistani scientist and terrorist Aafia Siddiqui ('Lady al-Qa'ida'), who is currently serving an 86-year prison sentence in the US. Siddiqui is a leading figure within the global jihadist movement. In the past ISIS, the Taliban and al Qa'ida have all sought to secure her release or called on others to work to that end. The hostage-taker's profile is similar to that of many jihadist attackers in the West. What makes this case different is that he carried out his attack in a foreign country, far from his own place of residence.

Pragmatic relationship between Turkey and ISIS in northern Syria

ISIS's activities in Turkey and the efforts of the Turkish authorities to crack down on ISIS members in Turkey have been described in previous editions of the DTN (including editions 52 and 55). Beyond this, it would appear that a pragmatic relationship has developed between Turkey and ISIS in northern Syria. Turkey has adopted a tactical approach to ISIS, and vice versa. In Turkey itself the situation is different: there, various leading figures within ISIS have been arrested in recent years. This pragmatic approach appears to be the result of the multifaceted terrorist threat facing Turkey.

Success and setbacks for ISIS

Since the fall of ISIS's last territorial bulwark in Syria in March 2019, the organisation has gone underground, shifting its focus to carrying out attacks in Syria and Iraq, and rebuilding the organisation. In recent months the number of ISIS attacks in Syria has stagnated, while the number of attacks in Iraq has declined. With the storming of Sina'a prison in northeastern Syria by ISIS fighters on 20 January 2022, the organisation showed that it is still capable of mounting large-scale, complex operations in its heartland. The prison, which was guarded by the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), held an estimated 3,000 to 5,000

ISIS fighters and suspected fighters, including in all likelihood a number of Dutch nationals, several ISIS leaders and a large number of foreign jihadists. The attack enabled an unknown number of prisoners to escape. Public sources put the number in the hundreds. This is the first time ISIS has carried out a large-scale attack on a prison in Syria. This operation is of great symbolic value for the organisation, as it shows that ISIS in Syria and Iraq is far from defeated. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that these escapes are a harbinger of the group's rapid advance, as was the case in the 2012-2014 period. ISIS is still too small and weak for that scenario. It is therefore not likely that ISIS will be able to conquer new territory as it did up until March 2019.

Once again the US has succeeded in tracking down the top leader of ISIS. Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi was killed in a US attack on the house where he was staying. The operation, which took place in the Syrian province of Idlib on 3 February 2022, was one of a series of successful US military operations targeting the top leaders of ISIS and other key jihadist figures in the region. The death of Al-Qurayshi has delivered a blow to the operational framework of ISIS. In early March an ISIS spokesperson announced that Abu Hasan al-Hashimi (an alias) had been appointed the new leader. Little is known about his background or intentions.

Limited terrorist threat from Afghanistan

Since the Taliban took power in Afghanistan in August 2021, the humanitarian, economic and human rights situation in the country has deteriorated. Physical security in the country is under pressure, primarily due to Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP).² Since the fall of Kabul, this organisation has evolved into the primary opponent of the Taliban regime, thanks in part to the release of a number of its members. ISKP has carried out terrorist attacks against the Taliban and against religious targets associated with Shiite minorities. These attacks have undermined the legitimacy of the Taliban, which had promised security to the Afghan people. The Taliban, which was itself until recently a belligerent in a protracted conflict, has no experience with fighting insurgents. Developments in Afghanistan could also destabilise parts of South Asia.

2 Khorasan is the Persian name for a historical region that encompassed parts of present-day Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.

India, in particular, is concerned about the support the Taliban is providing to terrorist groups seeking an end to Indian authority over the territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

As yet, it remains unclear how the terrorist threat to the West posed by Afghanistan will develop. These risks were previously noted in DTN55. They include the possibility that al Qa'ida will be granted more freedom of movement from the Taliban, with which it has friendly relations, that European jihadists will travel to Afghanistan, that terrorists will travel from Afghanistan to Europe, and that the Taliban's victory could inspire the jihadist community around the world to carry out new attacks. Thus far there are no indications that these risks became more concrete during the period under review. For the short term, therefore, the threat to the West posed by Afghanistan would seem to be relatively limited. For the Taliban it is still a top priority to secure the financial support of the international community and some form of diplomatic recognition. The transformation of Afghanistan into a jihadist bulwark would not help in this regard. The Taliban is not a homogeneous group, however. Local factions do not necessarily follow orders issued in the capital. It is also uncertain whether the Taliban is capable of effectively countering terrorist elements in Afghanistan. For this reason it is important for international intelligence services to keep a close eye on developments in Afghanistan. There are significant concerns about this, however, as Western intelligence capabilities in the country have dropped off sharply in the past year.

Sub-Saharan Africa: local motives, global affiliations

The previous DTN highlighted two risks of jihadist insurgencies in sub-Saharan Africa. First, they could target Dutch interests in the region, and second, they could create jihadist safe havens which may, in time, pose a threat to the European continent. Despite a number of military successes against jihadist groups affiliated with ISIS and al Qa'ida,³ the security situation in sub-Saharan African is not expected to improve significantly in the foreseeable future.

3 On the ISIS side these include: the neutralisation of a regional leader, the head of ISWAP-IGS (Adnan Abu al Walid al-Sahrawi) on 17 August 2021, and the recapture of a strategic coastal location in Mozambique (Mocimboa da Praia) from ISIS-Mozambique on 8 August 2021.

In East Africa, the Somalia-based al Shabaab, which is the strongest al Qa'ida affiliate in global terms, poses an ongoing threat to Western interests. In January a Dutch national of Somali origin was seriously wounded in the Somali capital of Mogadishu in an attack by al Shabaab targeting 'Western security personnel'. Later that month European embassies, including the Dutch embassy, warned of a possible imminent attack on 'Western targets and nationals' in Kenya. Here too, the likely attacker was al Shabaab.

In the Sahel in West Africa (Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso), the al Qa'ida affiliate Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) combines a strong local focus with the regional expansion strategy of its mother organisation al Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The southerly expansion of JNIM's influence, noted in previous editions of the DTN, is continuing. This has not only led to infiltrations and security incidents in the border areas of countries along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea, with attacks occurring in Côte d'Ivoire and (for the first time) in Togo and Benin. It has also given rise to more enduring contacts with al Qa'ida loyalists in the border region of northwestern Nigeria, who are again making their presence felt in that part of the country. Seen in these terms JNIM has a widespread operational area and potential for growth in the western Sahel, plus a good base for carrying out attacks in the wider region. France and its European partner countries are withdrawing their military counterterrorism operations from Mali. Henceforth they will be continuing this work from Niger. This constitutes a break with the Malian military regime, following its overtures to Russia. The departure of Western countries from Mali will probably give JNIM greater freedom of movement there. The presence in Mali of Russian soldiers and members of paramilitary groups – including, in all likelihood, mercenaries belonging to the Kremlin-linked Wagner Group – means an increased risk of human rights violations. There have already been cases of this, with the suspected involvement of Russian soldiers or members of paramilitary groups. Such harsh tactics only promote jihadist recruitment. In Niger the Western regional mission will encounter complications similar to those they struggled with in Mali; anti-French sentiment is also rife in Niger.

The groups loyal to ISIS in sub-Saharan Africa are the strongest, in military operational terms, in areas where they are not splinter groups of official al Qa'ida affiliates (the Lake Chad basin, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique). They all profit to some extent from their affiliation to the mother organisation in Syria and Iraq, which supports them materially and financially, advises them and confers status on them. Nevertheless, these are relatively autonomous groups, embedded in a local political landscape. At this time it is not likely that the intentions of groups loyal to ISIS in sub-Saharan Africa extend beyond their own local or regional agenda. From the perspective of the threat to the West, the coordinated double attack in the Ugandan capital of Kampala (November 2021) by jihadists of ISIS's Central Africa Province was the most striking. The bombs exploded a few kilometres from the Dutch embassy, in the commercial centre of Kampala, where Western embassies and companies are located and a relatively large expat population is based.

3. The right- and left-wing extremist threat

Analysis of the right-wing extremist threat

In order to interpret a number of key developments and incidents in the current Dutch right-wing extremist landscape, it is useful to posit three categories: classic right-wing extremism (including neo-Nazism), intellectual right-wing extremism (e.g. Erkenbrand) and accelerationism. At present, traditional neo-Nazi organisations like Blood & Honour, Combat 18 and the Racial Volunteer Force seem to play little if any role of significance in the Netherlands, and intellectual right-wing extremism has not been particularly prominent in the past six months.

Previous DTNs have discussed the concept of accelerationism, which originated in the US and has taken root in other Western countries in a relatively short time. Adherents of this right-wing extremist ideology 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 and replace the current political system with a white (national socialist) ethnostate. Within the right-wing extremist spectrum in the Netherlands it is this movement that poses the greatest threat of violence. It is composed of a few hundred Dutch young people who are active in private online communication platforms that propagate accelerationist ideology.

It is estimated that a small number of them may pose a violent threat. If it were to materialise, this threat would likely take the form of small- to medium-scale attacks using regular weapons, such as knives, firearms and explosives. Given the psychosocial problems that various accelerationists struggle with, their young age and the low levels of organisation, it is questionable whether they are actually capable of preparing and carrying out an attack involving any degree of complexity.

Previous criminal investigations of The Base in the Netherlands led to the arrest (in 2020) and subsequent conviction of two young men. In December 2021 Rotterdam District Court convicted these two individuals, aged 20 and 21, of participating in a terrorist organisation and inciting the commission of a terrorist offence. The two were sentenced to 24 months in prison, 18 of which were suspended, and an alternative sanction. The 21-year-old man was acquitted of preparing a terrorist offence. He claimed in a chatroom to have a document containing the cycling routes used by Prime Minister Rutte. But no such document was found in his possession. The 21-year-old

man was supposed to start a training course with the Netherlands' armed forces in late November 2020, but this was hindered by his arrest. Since these arrests at the end of 2020 there have been no further arrests of young Dutch accelerationists.

In recent months it is notable that the differences between the various groups in the right-wing extremist online scene have tended to be glossed over rather than accentuated as long as the core or the ultimate goal of right-wing extremist doctrine is upheld: global rule by the white race.

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, the right-wing extremist movement in the Netherlands, which for years has had little real-world visibility, had little success in capitalising on discontent about the government's pandemic policy. The anti-government narrative of an oppressive state dovetails neatly with the right-wing extremist conspiracy theory that the Jewish/leftist elite is failing to protect the Netherlands' traditions, culture, race and language. This has, however, given rise to new links between anti-government extremists and right-wing extremists, and these groups are known to interact, mainly online. During the COVID-19 protests, some mixing was observed with right-wing extremists.

Right-wing extremists show interest in firearms

The police are investigating criminal utterances made online by members and administrators of accelerationist accounts and chat groups. This group exhibits a great fascination for all manner of weapons. On Wednesday 9 February 2022, after the AIVD issued a person-specific report, a 33-year-old suspect was arrested in the province of Zeeland for possession of a 3D-printed semi-automatic gun. The man had made various right-wing extremist and racist statements online and also possessed right-wing extremist flags and other memorabilia. This arrest seems to support the impression that right-wing extremists are increasingly interested in 3D-printed firearms. This is troubling because this would lower the threshold for committing violence, including terrorist violence. The Central Unit of the National Police is currently conducting a wider investigation into 3D-printed firearms in the Netherlands, which are mainly to be found in the criminal underworld rather than ideological groups. The police have received various indications that individuals within right-wing extremist circles have joined or attempted to join shooting clubs, or have otherwise shown an interest in guns and training in firearms.

Concerns about appeal of armed forces to young right-wing extremists

In its 2020 annual report the Defence Intelligence and Security Service (MIVD) observed that some young right-wing extremists in the Netherlands are attracted by the idea of working for the armed forces. The above-mentioned 21-year-old man would seem to be an example of this. The radicalisation of elements within the armed forces entails serious risks, especially given these individuals' access to and familiarity with firearms. There have been various examples in other countries in recent years of defence personnel who became radicalised and then threatened or carried out violence. It is understandable that the idea of joining the armed forces appeals to young right-wing extremists. For example, the outward presentation of accelerationist groups is strongly inspired by the military. Martial values, such as comradeship, courage and loyalty, are also embraced by many right-wing extremists. There is also a strong affinity with weapons within the right-wing extremist movement. A relatively new phenomenon is that people in online accelerationist networks are being advised to use the military to gain experience with guns and fighting, in order to prepare for the 'final battle'. New recruits to the right-wing extremist movement are often very young. These are people who have yet to choose a career path and who can easily be influenced in that regard by right-wing extremist sentiment.

So far right-wing extremists show little interest in travelling to Ukraine

Shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine in late February 2022, the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, announced the establishment of a 'foreign legion'. Shortly thereafter, the Ukrainian embassy in The Hague reported that it had received 200 enlistments from the Netherlands, both from people with a Ukrainian or Polish background and from ethnically Dutch people, including veterans. Because this group may gain combat experience, certain security risks could arise upon their return (especially within their personal lives). Because of the non-extremist character of the official Ukrainian 'foreign legion', it is unlikely that participation in this unit will entail risks to the Netherlands from a counterterrorism perspective. There is, however, a risk that the war in Ukraine will hold some appeal for right-wing extremists in the Netherlands. This would not be a new phenomenon. According to researchers, between 2014 and

2021, a number of Dutch right-wing extremists fought in Ukraine, some with Ukrainian combat groups and some with separatist/Russian combat groups. It is possible that participants in the conflict could wind up in right-wing extremist units. Upon returning to the Netherlands they could pose a risk to national security. Nevertheless, for the time being it is unlikely that large numbers of right-wing extremists will depart for the war zone. Most right-wing extremists in the Netherlands do not seem to have any interest in travelling to Ukraine at present.

International trends related to right-wing extremism

Outside the Netherlands right-wing extremist groups and anti-government groups are becoming intertwined

In Canada, Spain, Ireland, Australia, the UK and Germany, security and intelligence services have observed significant links among pandemic protest groups and right-wing extremist organisations. Protests in these countries have been more violent than those in the Netherlands. A few examples from other countries illustrate the violent polarisation surrounding opposition to pandemic policy that has become visible in the period under review. At anti-vaccine rallies in New York in late 2021 right-wing extremists came to blows with counter-demonstrators. In October 2021 Italian neo-Fascists and demonstrators in Rome took part in a mass protest against vaccines that degenerated into violence and an attempt to storm the offices of the prime minister. In the same country right-wing extremists vandalised the office of a trade union following a demonstration against the COVID-19 entry pass. In Belgium the right-wing extremist instrumentalisation of the pandemic protests became clear when riots broke out at protests in Brussels against government measures in late 2021 and early 2022.

Far-left groups and left-wing extremists more active

Left-wing extremist and far-left groups in the Netherlands have been more visible in the past few months than in the year before. Their protest actions, which were predominantly lawful in nature, were sometimes aimed at disrupting public order. In contrast to the wait-and-see attitude they adopted in 2020 and much of 2021, the far left took part in a number of protests with dozens of demonstrators in the second half of 2021 and early 2022. Although far-left protesters are also opposed to certain

aspects of the government's pandemic policy, their own protest actions centred on coronavirus demonstrations that they perceived as being used to disseminate far-right propaganda. The far left also participated in demonstrations related to the climate and the housing shortage. In some cases left-wing extremists were violent. During the housing protest on 17 October 2021 in Rotterdam, protesters deliberately provoked a confrontation with the police using the 'black bloc' technique. The allegedly excessive use of force on the part of the police during the demonstration was widely discussed, and leftist and far-left channels called for protest actions. In a few cases there was property damage, such as when the headquarters of the political party Forum for Democracy was pelted with fireworks and daubed with paint by a group of anti-fascists. During a torch-lit protest against pandemic policy held on 12 January 2022 in Utrecht, there was a violent confrontation provoked by a group of anti-fascists who were opposed to those protesting the government's pandemic measures, including individuals connected to the far-right splinter party NVU.

Climate protests and the animal rights movement in the Netherlands are also mainly characterised by lawful activism or civil disobedience, such as the occupation of buildings, intersections, or stables and slaughterhouses. There is a certain amount of international contact and solidarity between both the far left (the radical asylum rights movement, anarchism) and climate and animal rights activists. It is uncertain whether this stable situation will continue to prevail in the Netherlands in the years ahead. Within left-wing extremist and far-left circles there is discontent about the government, fuelled by their opposition to pandemic and climate policy, the housing situation, perceived police violence and right-wing extremist visibility at pandemic protests. These sentiments could be a future breeding ground for further left-wing extremist protests in the Netherlands.

Involvement of PKK youth in storming OPCW

Various young Kurds from outside the Netherlands stormed the OPCW building in The Hague on 3 December 2021. Various arrests were made in connection with this incident. Kurdish organisations allied to the PKK are conducting an international campaign against the alleged use of chemical weapons by Turkey in Kurdish areas. The OPCW in The Hague is therefore seen as a key institution by the PKK.

4. Anti-government extremism

Pandemic protests in the Netherlands: a law-abiding mainstream and a radical undercurrent

Once again during the period under review, discontent in the Netherlands about the coronavirus measures has mainly taken the form of activities undertaken by a law-abiding mainstream and a radical undercurrent. The former group conducts lawful protests within the bounds of the democratic legal order. However, the second group, the radical undercurrent, engages in extremist acts such as inciting criminal activity and making threats. Broadly speaking, this radical undercurrent can be divided into three sub-categories: just under 20 agitators (online and in the physical world); between ten and fifty thousand people who follow them online and actively disseminate their radical content, and tens of thousands of people who simply consume this radical content. In some cases there is naturally some degree of overlap. About 100 people from this radical undercurrent have actually committed acts of real-world intimidation in the past two years, for example against public figures like government ministers Hugo de Jonge and Sigrid Kaag. In this regard it is striking that in the past two-and-a-half years, acts of intimidation in the public space have generally been committed by the same known individuals, who could be described as ‘revolving door fanatics’.

During the pandemic there was relatively little serious violence from the radical undercurrent, despite all the threatening talk online. The danger that this radical undercurrent poses to national security is probably rooted, both now and in the future, in its subversive effect on the democratic legal order. Since the second half of 2021, some individuals and groups (both online and off) within this undercurrent have only grown more radical, confronting and speaking about leading public figures in language suffused with hostility, fanaticism and fantasies of violent retribution. Individuals who represent democracy and the rule of law, such as government ministers, are described in dehumanising terms. Vulnerable people are particularly susceptible to encouragement and instigation from the above-mentioned groups of agitators (both online and in the physical world). For this reason, individual acts of terrorist violence targeting specific persons is conceivable. There are currently no indications that an attack is being planned.

Virologists have indicated that there is still a risk of new coronavirus variants emerging, meaning there may be a resurgence of actions by the radical undercurrent if restrictive measures are reintroduced. Agitators and conspiracy theorists are also likely to shift their focus to other societal issues on which they oppose the government. There are already examples that suggest a pro-Putin discourse opposed to Western governments is being spread by this radicalised undercurrent. As the war in Ukraine continues, the subversive anti-government rhetoric from this undercurrent will probably intensify, causing a possible increase in polarisation around current issues related to the war (e.g. the reception of refugees). However, the Russian-Ukrainian war is not expected to have the same mobilising effect on anti-government activists and extremists as COVID-19. Although the war is having a tangible and, for the time being, lasting impact (e.g. in the form of high fuel prices and the arrival of Ukrainian refugees), it is not currently affecting Dutch people's personal freedoms. Moreover, the Russian narrative has found little if any sympathy among the Dutch public, whereas a critical attitude towards COVID-19 measures was more more widespread in society.

Intimidating modus operandi towards politicians and others

Various criminal investigations have revealed the existence of overlapping online and real-world groups of various sizes that are interconnected through various conspiracies that rely on anti-government thinking. Within that digital ecosystem, threatening language is commonplace and in some cases individuals discuss plans for attacks of a terrorist nature. One example of this is a 22-year-old man who was arrested in the summer of 2021 on suspicion of plotting the assassination of Prime Minister Mark Rutte. He was in search of weapons, and made arrangements to discuss his plans with others. Other forms of intimidating behaviour have shed light on individuals with a focus on politicians. On 5 January 2022 a 29-year-old man was arrested at the residence of Sigrid Kaag, leader of the political party D66. He stood there with a burning torch while being filmed for a YouTube channel. He had previously been arrested in mid-December after going to the home of health minister Hugo de Jonge. This man was sentenced to six months in prison, and the 44-year-old woman who had filmed him was sentenced to four months. In mid-March 2022 the leader of the organisation Viruswaarheid (virus truth) was arrested, and

subsequently released, on suspicion of inciting the commission, via his internet channels, of criminal offences against staff of the municipal health service. He remains a suspect in this case.

Conspiracy theories are rife within the radical undercurrent

In contrast to most activists, whose willingness to demonstrate during the pandemic clearly depended on the nature of the measures, some individuals have become radicalised. For several years now the radical undercurrent has been fuelled by conspiracy theories in which leading figures, members of the government and those responsible for implementing government policy are de-humanised, being referred to a ‘reptiles’, ‘blood-drinking paedophiles’, ‘enemies of freedom’ and ‘defenders of dictatorship’. These individuals seem to believe that they live in a world in which the people are in a state of permanent war with their own government. They get caught up in uncompromising anti-government attitudes, conspiracy theories or religious ideology, and this confers a sense of legitimacy on what are sometimes highly radical acts. In addition, there are also individuals who actively turn their backs on society and refuse to acknowledge the rules of democracy governed by the rule of law. Submitting a ‘declaration of sovereignty’ to the municipality or refusing to pay fines and taxes are examples of behaviours associated with people who feel a kinship with the budding ‘sovereign citizen movement’.

Certain utterances by public figures may give individuals in this radical undercurrent a sense of being heard and legitimated in their radical behaviour. A small number of individuals contributing to the political discourse have employed a radicalised COVID-19 narrative involving various conspiracy theories. For example, in mid-November 2021 there was an outcry in parliament when a member of the House suggested that a fellow MP should be called before a tribunal for their part in the government’s COVID-19 policy. This seemed like a direct echo of the online ecosystem, which has only grown worse since the start of the pandemic. Soon after this, a number of ordinary citizens in various places threatened to drag civil servants before a tribunal. On the other hand, this degree of polarisation in the political realm also entails the risk that a public figure who speaks about the pandemic in such radical terms could themselves be threatened in turn.

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 Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV) publishes the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands (DTN) two to three times a year. The DTN presents a broad analysis of the threat to the Netherlands posed by domestic and international terrorism. It looks at trends that serve as a potential forerunner to terrorism (such as extremism or radicalisation) or factors that can form a breeding ground for terrorism, such as negative forms of polarisation. 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. The NCTV does not monitor social media accounts for the purpose of the DTN.

Publication

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