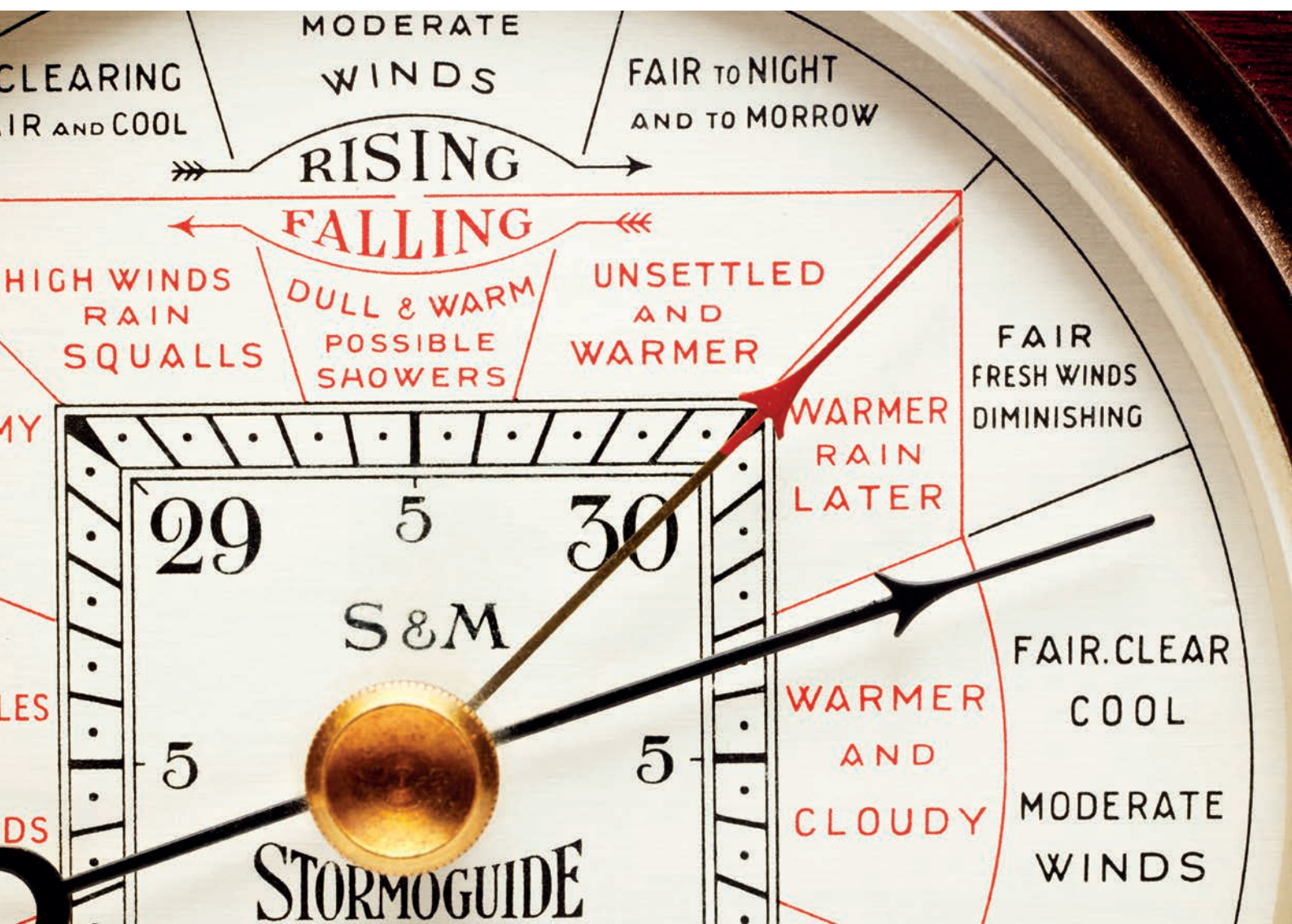# Threat Barometer

Ten Years of Terrorist Threat Assessment Netherlands 2005 - 2015

Threat Barometer

Ten Years of Terrorist Threat Assessment Netherlands 2005 - 2015

Edwin Bakker and Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn[1]

Contents

1   Introduction

The first Terrorist Threat Assesment Netherlands (*Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland, DTN*) was published ten years ago.
The letter of the Ministers of Justice and of the Interior and Kingdom Relations to the Speaker of the House of Representatives of 10 June 2005 states that "to place the measures taken [in the scope of counterterrorism] in the right context, this letter begins with an outline of the current threat assessment". This heralded a new Dutch counterterrorism product provided by what was then a newcomer to the field: the National Coordinator for Counter-terrorism *(Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding, NCTb)*. This party had and has - now under the name National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security *(Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid, NCTV)* the task of directing and coordinating counterterrorist activities in the Netherlands.

The NCTb/NCTV is not only responsible for developing a clear and unambiguous counterterrorism policy, but also plays a key role in providing information on this subject to relevant politicians and policymakers, the general population and the business community. The public version of the DTN was and remains an important instrument for informing not only the general public but also the House of Representatives about the seriousness, scope and direction of the terrorist threat.[2] In addition to this public version there is a Ministerial Confidential version and a State Secret version for the people bearing the most direct responsibility for the counterterrorism policy, such as the ministers and members of the Parliamentary Committee on the Intelligence and Security Services.

In recent years the DTN has become a familiar government report that can be read and downloaded[3] on several websites, which forms the subject of many Parliamentary Questions and attracts a lot of media attention. This makes it an important governmental communication channel on the subjects of radicalisation, terrorism and counterterrorism.

In this essay[4], which was commissioned by the NCTV to mark the occasion of the conference "Threat Barometer. Ten years of Terrorist Threat Assessments for the Netherlands 2005-2015", we address this and other aspects of the DTN and consider how this instrument has developed over the past decade. We also analyse the threat assessment itself: what were the key issues and trends in the area of terrorism? We then turn to the context in which the DTN is published. In the conclusions we set out the nature, form and content of the DTN. We also reflect on the future of the DTN. However this essay begins with an answer to the question of why we actually have a DTN and how this threat assessment came about.

[2] Paul Abels, 2008, "*Dreigingsbeeld terrorisme Nederland: nut en noodzaak van een 'all-source threat assessment' bij terrorismebestrijding*" in: E.R. Muller, U. Rosenthal, R. de Wijk (ed.), *Terrorisme: Studies over terrorisme en terrorismebestrijding,* (Kluwer: Deventer), p.542.

[3] By way of illustration, DTNs 37, 38 and 38 were downloaded a total of 21,719 times in 2015 (source: NCTV).

[4] The sources we have consulted are the public summaries of the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands as published by the NCTV since May 2005 up to November 2015 (DTN1 to DTN40).

2   Why a DTN?

The recent history of terrorism and counterterrorism can be divided into a pre and post '9/11' era. The attacks on the United States on the eleventh of September 2001 sent shock waves all over the world. Never before had there been an attack this magnitude. For some time the term 'catastrophic terrorism' was in vogue as a way of describing of the new threat. A lack of clarity about what citizens were facing led to a need for more information about the terrorist threat and to the idea of setting threat levels as a guide for citizens and governments. There was an especially pressing need for information in the United States.

This led in March 2002 to a presidential directive aimed at bringing about "a comprehensive and effective means to disseminate information regarding the risk of terrorist acts to Federal, State, and local authorities and to the American people"[5]. This was linked to a colour code system. – the 'colour-coded advisory system'.

The system faced heavy criticism from the very beginning. Security experts, academics, journalists and non-governmental organisations highlighted the lack of clear criteria for the various threat levels. This made it impossible to independently establish whether a certain threat level was present. It was partly against this background that it was assumed, rightly or not, that political leaders manipulate the threat level for political purposes.[6] Doubts were also expressed about the communicative value of the system if the threat is in practice always high (yellow or orange) and never low (blue or green). There comes a time when nobody takes them seriously any more, especially if there are few or no attacks. As well as that it turned out that raising (or lowering) the threat level had all sorts of side effects that some believed did not weigh up against the benefit. Examples include reduced confidence in the economy and specific implications for certain sectors, such as the travel or recreation industries. Raising the threat level could also create unnecessary anxiety and have all sorts of undesirable political consequences.[7]

Communication on threats

As shown above, communicating the terrorist threat is no easy task. Communication on terrorism should generally contribute to peace and calm whilst - in the event of a high threat level - also indicate that a threat is actually present. Government communication on this subject should ideally contribute to confidence in the govern-

ment itself and support for the counterterrorist measures and the policy in general.

Perhaps even more difficult is the fact that communication on the terrorist threat may warn the general public against something, but will not offer any perspective for action.[8] We are occasionally asked to be alert, but to what, and how? Moreover, a low threat level does not give the public any guarantee that no attack can take place and a high threat level does not necessarily mean that there will be an attack today or tomorrow. That, too, must be communicated, and this detracts from the whole idea of announcing a threat or high alert level. It is also very difficult for the security services and counterterrorist coordinators to determine the precise level of the threat. Certainly in Europe with its open borders it is not sufficient to consider the threat within national boundaries alone. Also, Dutch citizens and businesses abroad can fall victim to terrorism. And there are big differences between certain parts of the country, between demographic groupings and between branches of industry as regards the chance of becoming the target of or witnessing a terrorist attack. Bringing all this together under a single term - 'limited', 'elevated', 'vigilance' - or colour - green, orange, red - is therefore an impossible task.

Another challenge is found in lowering the threat level. It is often difficult to explain why it is being lowered and what this means to the general public. Does it mean that people no longer need to be alert? And what does it mean to the government or the business community: fewer security measures, scaling down certain activities or even introducing cutbacks at the intelligence and security services? Put simply, communicating on the terrorist threat level gives rise to many questions that are not easy to answer.

Despite the challenges involved in communicating about terrorist threats and despite the limitations of the warning systems it is important to psychologically prepare the public for counterterrorist measures and the possibility of an attack. It is important to prevent terrorists from easily being able to take the public by surprise with an attack, thus intensifying the impact of their acts. The same applies to counterterrorist measures, such as extra security at stations. Members of the public have to know where they stand and to understand why certain - visible - measures are being taken. Communication on the terrorist threat, especially in the form of warning systems, can raise alertness among the population and thus give the police, judicial authorities and security services extra eyes and ears.[9] Not only citizens, but also certain companies and event organisers are thus enabled to report suspicious behaviour,

5   The White House, 2002, Homeland Security Presidential Directive-3, consulted on 25-11-2015, georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/03/20020312-5.html

6   See for example the following article about political pressure concerning threat levels: Associated Press, "Ridge says he was pressured to raise terror alert",20-08-2009, http://www.nbcnews.com/id/32501273/ns/us_news-security/t/ridge-says-he-was-pressured-raise-terror-alert/.

7   Taylor Grossman, 2015, The Problem of Warning: Homeland Security and the Evolution of Terrorism Advisory Systems, Thesis: Stanford University; Jacob N. Shapiro and Dary Kay Cohen, "Color Bind; Lessons from the Failed Homeland Security Advisory System", International Security, vol. 32, no. 2. (Fall 2007), pp.121-154.

8   For more about the importance of giving citizens a perspective for action, see Edwin Bakker and Beatrice de Graaf, 2014, Towards a theory of fear management in the counterterrorism domain: a stocktaking approach. ICCT Research Paper, The Hague: ICCT, January 2014.

9   Anthony Bergin en Clare Murphy, 2015, Sounding the alarm. Terrorism threat communications with the Australian public, Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

to report certain thefts or put extra security measures in place. Examples include an old NCTV television bulletin on the need to be alert to stolen chemicals (see figure 1).

The precise effect of this is unclear. Could this frustrate attacks, and how do terrorists respond to calls for alertness and extra security measures? There are no precise answers to these questions. There are however some well-known examples of members of the public or security guards who have prevented attacks or managed to reduce the number of victims. A case in point is the passenger on the Thalys train between Brussels and Paris who was suspicious about a conspicuous person who stayed for so long in the toilet with his luggage. He went to take a look and confronted him, whereupon this person pulled out a weapon, prompting the attentive passenger and others to take action in time.

Examples

Before turning to the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands, it is worth first considering some examples from abroad. The alert system launched in the United States after 9/11 and discussed above formed the starting point for many countries. This system, the Security Advisory System of the Department of Homeland Security, was based on a successful warning system for forest fires in which the chance of one taking place was indicated by five colours (green, blue, yellow, orange and red). These colours were also used to indicate the potential seriousness of the terrorist threat. Each level was linked to certain measures, not all of which were communicated to the general public. Each level also featured certain recommendations for members of the public – communicated

via the "Citizen Guidance on the Homeland Security Advisory System"[10]– and for federal government agencies. – via de "Homeland Security Advisory System – Guidance for Federal Departments and Agencies".[11] In practice the colour was often set to orange - "high risk of terrorist attack" - and never to blue or green and did not provide the public with much practical information. In 2011 the colour code system was replaced by the National Terrorism Advisory System[12], which was intended to provide more detailed information about an elevated or imminent terrorist threat as and when necessary. An 'alert' such as this provides details about the nature of the threat, its duration and the threatened areas or sectors. No such public warning was given between 2011 and November 2015. There is also a secret or confidential variant for certain sectors, such as utilities companies, airports and financial institutions.[13]

The United Kingdom also operates a system of national terrorist threat levels. The level is based on evaluations and the extent and nature of the threat of international terrorism, and the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) is responsible for this. The British Security Service (MI5) is responsible for assessing the domestic terrorist threat in the United Kingdom. This service focuses mainly on the situation in Northern Ireland.[14] The system features two different terrorist alert levels: one for Northern Ireland and one for international terrorism. The JTAC not only sets the threat levels but also communicates them to the general public, relevant governmental services and private partners.[15] The public terrorist alert system in the United Kingdom features five levels: 'low', 'moderate', 'substantial', 'severe' and 'critical'. Since 2006 the information about the national threat level has been available on the websites of MI5 and the Home Office. In September 2010 the threat levels for terrorism in Northern Ireland were also made public.

France has a national terrorist alert system called Plan Vigipirate. The system has undergone a number of developments since 1995.

[10] The Western Governors' Association (WGA), Homeland Security Advisory System--Guidance for Federal Departments and Agencies, consulted on 24-11-2015, http: www.westgov.org/component/docman/doc_download/ 281-department-of-homeland-security-national-security- threat-levels-unclassified?Itemid=.

[11] The Western Governors'Association (WGA), Homeland Security Advisory System-Guidance for Federals Departments and Agencies, consulted on 24-11-2015, http:www.westgov.org/component/docman/doc_download/ 281-department-of-homeland-security-national-security-treat-levels-unclassified?Itemid=

[12] Department of Homeland Security, National Terrorism Advisory System, consulted on 18-11-2015, http://www.dhs.gov/national-terrorism-advisory-system.

[13] Department of Homeland Security, National Terrorism Advisory System, consulted on 18-11-2015, http://www.dhs.gov/national-terrorism-advisory-system.

[14] MI5, 2015, What is Terrorism?, consulted on 24-11-2015, https://www.mi5. gov.uk/home/about-us/what-we-do/the-threats/terrorism.html.

[15] IBP, 2013, United Kingdom Intelligence Services Handbook: Volume 1 Strategic Information, Activities and Regulations, p.104.

Up until February 2014 the system featured a four colour code model. After that the number of levels was restricted to a 'vigilance' category and an 'imminent attack' ('alert attentat') category. For the 'vigilance' level various monitoring and screening measures are put in place, including surveillance in public transport and crowded areas and entry control at public buildings. This level can be raised for a certain location for a limited amount of time. The public are not necessarily informed of this. In the case of an 'alerte attentat' the French government takes special measures, such as the declaration of a state of emergency and the closure of national borders in November 2015. This can be implemented for a certain part of France or for the entire territory and is generally limited to a short period of time. The public are informed of this through official statements made by the president, the prime minister and/or other ministers. There is also a government website that provides information about the situation and the threat level of the Plan Vigipirate.[16]

Since 2006 neighbouring Belgium has operated the integrated assessment of the terrorist threat in Belgium, formulated by the Threat Coordination and Analysis Agency (Orgaan voor de Coördinatie en de Analyse van de Dreiging, OCAD). The OCAD's threat assessments are intended for the various political, administrative or judicial authorities with responsibility for security. These are the agencies that will ultimately have to take appropriate measures to avert an identified threat. The agency is placed under the joint authority of the Ministers of Home Affairs and Justice.[17] This assessment also features threat levels: four categories, from 'low' to 'very serious'. The level remained 'low' for a long period of time, but in the autumn of 2015 and following the attacks in November 2015 in particular it quickly rose from 'medium' to 'very serious' (see box 1). Level 4 – 'very serious' - is operated if the threat against people, groups or events is serious and very close.[18]

In March 2015 the terrorist threat level in Belgium was level 2, which calls for general alertness. The OCAD raised this to level 3 during that month for certain specific institutions and locations. The Belgian connection to the attacks in Paris during the night of 13/14 November 2015 resulted in the level being raised to 3 for the whole of Belgium, mainly in response to the fact that one or more of the perpetrators had escaped and crossed the French/Belgian border. A week later the threat level in the Brussels Region was scaled up to 4, the highest level. This level means that the threat is 'serious and very close'. The measures taken included stopping the underground railway system and closing all cafes and restaurants in the capital, in which the streets were dominated by a military presence.

[16] Le secrétariat général de la défense et de la sécurité nationale (SGDSN), 2014, *De Vigilance, de prevention et de protection face aux menaces d'actions terrorists*, consulted on 22-11-2015, http://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/Partie_publique_du_plan_Vigipirate_2014.pdf.

[17] *Vast Comité van Toezicht op de inlichtingen- en veiligheidsdiensten, OCAD), Wat is het Coördinatieorgaan voor de dreigingsanalyse?,* consulted on 24-11-2015, http://www.comiteri.be/index.php/nl/19-pages-nl-nl-1/54-wat-is-het-cooerdinatieorgaan-voor-de-dreigingsanalyse.

[18] *Crisiscentrum, Terroristische dreiging,* consulted on 22-11-2015, http://crisiscentrum.be/nl/inhoud/terroristische-dreiging.

3 Origin, purpose and form

Following the attacks on 11 September 2001 a need arose among the Dutch public for a clearer understanding of the nature and scope of the terrorist threat and the measures to protect the population. The government responded to this with various letters to the House of Representatives and progress reports on the action plan Counterterrorism and Security, which was drawn up a few weeks after the attacks. The General Consultation of the House of Representatives on terrorism and counterterrorism provided information about the nature and scope of the threat and the policy adopted in that regard. Also, the National Security Service, known since May 2002 as the General Intelligence and Security Service, provided information about the terrorist threat in the Netherlands in the form of public reports and a public annual report. However, in 2003 the House of Representatives, in the person of PvdA member Kalsbeek, called for a 'well-considered communication strategy' for the general public. The Ministers of the Interior and Justice endorsed the need to properly inform and alert Dutch society on matters concerning the risk of an attack. They also stressed the importance of the political and societal debate on terrorism and how the government should go about countering it.[19]

National alert system

The need for insight and information about the terrorist threat became even greater following the attacks in Madrid in 2004. In response to this terrorist attack the Ministers of Justice and the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK) announced in September 2004 that National Alert System (NAS) would have to be put in place to inform the public authorities, the business community and the public about current threats and risks.[20] The government eventually decided - in anticipation of the broader NAS - only to call into being a Counterterrorism Alert System (ATb) for terrorist threats. This ATb can be used to alert a selection of companies and public authorities to an elevated terrorist threat. This makes it possible for them to put predetermined security measures in place.[21] Far from offering a general threat assessment it is a warning system specifically for public and private sectors organisations such as airports, the chemical industry and the telecom sector.[22]

It was not until after this that an alert system for the general public was put in place. This was initiated by a newcomer brought into being following the attacks in Madrid: the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism (NCTb). The NCTb, in the person of Tjibbe Joustra, was tasked with coordinating the activities of the police, judiciary, security services and other relevant counterterrorism organisations.

The regulations of the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations establishing the NCTb state that this coordinator is also tasked with "gathering, combining and refining information received from intelligence services and administrative and scientific sources for the integral terrorist analyses and threat assessments".[23]

On being appointed Joustra concluded that it was not possible to coordinate the terrorism policy without having access to an "up-to-date and periodically adjusted general threat assessment".[24] In his view an assessment along these lines would have to serve as a "substantive basis and guideline" for counterterrorism in the Netherlands.[25]

It was against this background that the principle parties involved in this in the Netherlands were asked to provide analysed information four times a year on developments relevant to outlining the current terrorist threat in the Netherlands. The first threat assessment was drawn up in 2005, in which contributions of relevant parties were supplemented with the expertise of the Knowledge & Analysis directorate of the NCTb.[26] As a result of this there was no National Alert System but rather two different systems: the ATb and the DTN (see appendix II for the difference between the ATb and the DTN). For this rest of this essay we focus on the DTN in general and the public version of it in particular.

Broader view

The Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands (DTN) is a global assessment of the national and international terrorist threat against the Netherlands and Dutch interests abroad. The Dutch 'broad approach' to counterterrorism is an important starting point in this regard. The foundation of this approach was put in place by the AIVD at the end of the previous millennium. It is aimed at "the early detection of radicalisation processes among groups and individuals to prevent them, by means of targeted intervention strategies, from committing terrorist acts".[27]

According to terrorism expert Paul Abels the consequence of the broad approach is that the DTN not only addresses terrorists, their networks, intentions and activities but also the radicalisation processes within various groups and environmental factors such as polarisation.[28] These groups, processes and factors are not limited in terms of the actions or effects to the territory of the Netherlands. Developments abroad and Dutch activities beyond

[19] Paul Abels, 2012, *De brede benadering in de terrorismebestrijding: oorsprong, ontwikkeling en stand van zaken,* https://www.nctv.nl/Images/brede-benadering-in-de-terrorismebestrijding_tcm126-443897.pdf, p.2.

[20] Parliamentary papers 31499 no. 2, Parliamentary year 2007-2008, Counterterrorism Alert System, published on 3-7-2008.

[21] Parliamentary papers 31499 no. 2, Parliamentary year 2007-2008, Counterterrorism Alert System, published on 3-7-2008.

[22] National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (NCTV), Counterterrorism Alert System, consulted on 24-11-2015, https://www.nctv.nl/onderwerpen/tb/atb/.

[23] J.P.H. Donner and J.W. Remkes, 2005, "Regulations establishing the National Counterterrorism Coordinator", Government Gazette, Volume 2005, no. 127, p. 1.

[24] Abels, "*Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland*", p.537.

[25] Idem, p.537.

[26] Idem, p.537.

[27] Paul Abels, 2012, De brede benadering in de terrorismebestrijding: oorsprong, ontwikkeling en stand van zaken, https://www.nctv.nl/Images/brede-benadering-in-de- terrorismebestrijding_tcm126-443897.pdf, p.1.

[28] Abels, "*Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland*", p.537.

the national borders and the defence policy also have a major effect on the Dutch threat assessment. These matters are therefore also included in the DTN.

A broad approach to terrorism also means that Dutch factors and processes that could limit the threat are included in the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands. According to Abels it is of great importance "also to bear in mind the extent to which a government, society and specific/relevant demographic groupings are willing and able to put up resistance against certain threats to which they are exposed".[29]

It is against this background that developments concerning societal resistance are described in the DTN. In the first DTNs in particular, attention was also paid to the resistance of the government in the form of practical countermeasures.

Realisation

According to Paul Abels the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands is what is known as an 'all source threat assessment'. The general threat level for the Netherlands and Dutch interests abroad is determined on the basis of a broad range of information. For the DTN use is made of classified information from services charged with counterterrorism and/or countering radicalisation processes. The AIVD also of course makes an important contribution, in which the primary developments concerning the current threat assessment are outlined. But the Dutch Military Intelligence and Security Service (MIVD) also makes a substantial contribution, as do foreign sister services of the NCTV such as the JTAC, and the National Intelligence Service (DLIO), which is a division of the National Police. Information from sources in the public domain, administrative sources, scientific sources and analyses of the NCTV itself are used as well.[30] There are various other government services that also contribute to specific areas. They include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the foreign component, or services such as the Naturalization and Immigration Service (IND), Customs, the Fiscal Intelligence and Investigation Service and Economic Investigation Service (FIOD-ECD) and the Public Prosecution Service. Finally, municipal services with a security task provide information important to drawing up the DTN.

In the 'Terrorism' book edited by Erwin Muller, Uri Rosenthal and Rob de Wijk, Paul Abels describes the realisation of the DTN.

"The analysts of the NCTV study and compare all of these contributions to the DTN. They add to this insights and information that they have gleaned from the classified information shared with the NCTV, open sources and scientific literature on the various themes and produce an integral draft text. The draft DTN is then sent back to the services that delivered the information for comment. It is possible that the

analyses of these parties yield different - sometimes conflicting - insights on one or more aspects. In that case the specialists involved sit down together to consider each other's analyses once again and listen to the underlying arguments. The idea of this is not to arrive at negotiated conclusions but to tighten up the insights. Since counterterrorism usually involves probability reasoning with outcomes that cannot be mathematically defined, there may be times when the various parties maintain their viewpoints even after the discussion. In that case the difference in opinion is not suppressed in the text but explicitly mentioned." [31]

Abels regards the multiplicity of sources and parties involved in the production of the threat assessment as being something that hugely enhances its quality. This applies especially to the exchanges and peer reviews of the analytical insights between the various parties. This approach rules out the possibility of misinterpreting the information provided. The ultimate threat assessment and threat level are set not by the minister but by the NCTV. This independence is fairly unique. In fact, it is not held for any official product other than those of advisory bodies such as the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) or the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV). This independence guarantees that the threat assessments do not become politicised. The policy subsequently linked to the DTN is of course a consequence of political choices, which makes it not an independent but a political product. This is the underlying reason for the division between the DTN and the Parliamentary Letter with policy implications.

Users

The DTN is intended first and foremost as a substantive basis for counterterrorism in the Netherlands and for the protection of the Netherlands and Dutch interests abroad. The parties bearing the most direct responsibility for this policy are the Joint Counter-terrorism Committee (GCT), the Netherlands Joint Intelligence Committee (CVIN), the Council for Intelligence and Security Services (RIV) - a sub-council of the Council of Ministers and the members of the Intelligence and Security Services Committee of the House of Representatives (CIVD). They receive the most detailed version: the State Secret Confidential (or higher) classified version. This version can also be sent to the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator following consultation with the AIVD and, if relevant, with the MIVD.

Following discussion in the RIVD a departmental confidential classified version of the DTN is drawn up.[32] This version is distributed among the King's Commissioners, the mayors of the biggest local authorities, the chief constables, the chief public prosecutors, and a number of other relevant national services. In some cases it is also shared with sister organisations of the NCTV abroad. The most sensitive passages are removed from the ministerial confidential versions, not least in order to protect sources.

The public version of the DTN is sent by the ministers to the House of Representatives and is made available to all citizens via the NCTV

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[29] Idem, p.537.

[30] National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (NCTV), Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands, consulted on 24-11-2015, https://www.nctv.nl/onderwerpen/tb/atb/.

[31] Abels, "*Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland*", p.539.

[32] Abels, "*Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland*", p.541.

website. With this website, with which a start was made in 2005, the Dutch government is following the example of countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, where citizens were already kept informed of the terrorist threat and counterterrorist measures online in previous years.

From its inception onwards the DTN attracted a lot of media attention, also when the website was launched. "With the website that was opened on Friday by the National Counterterrorism Coordinator Tjibbe Joustra, the ministries of Justice and the Interior have provided a central overview of the terrorist threat. Up until now that information was fragmented among various ministries and intelligence services", stated the national newspaper De Volkskrant on 19 September 2005.[33]

Each newly published threat assessment can also count on media attention. In most cases the release of a DTN is marked by a press conference and a more detailed explanation by the NCTV in the media. A new DTN and its covering letter by the government with policy measures virtually always gives rise to a debate in the House of Representatives, e.g. in the permanent committees for the Interior and Kingdom Relations, Defence, Security and Justice, or Social Affairs and Employment.

Threat assessment and threat levels

The Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands (DTN) is in essence a quality assessment of key points. In many respects it takes the form of a trend analysis that provides general information about the direction taken in the development of the terrorist threat. According to Abels the DTN is by no means a risk assessment "in which the nature, seriousness and probability of a threat (the threat assessment) is set off against an estimate of the resistance presented against such a threat in the form of security measures and/or the degree of security awareness among potential victims, targets or certain demographic groupings and communities (the resistance assessment)".[34] Nor are any policy recommendations made in the DTN. Any policy proposals and policy measures are given a separate covering letter from the government to the House of Representatives.

One aspect of a risk assessment has however found its way into the DTN: the notion of threat levels to indicate the terrorist threat against the Netherlands. In 2005 the NCTb opted for a system featuring four levels and for the terms 'minimum', 'limited', 'substantial' and 'critical'. These indicate the general probability of the Netherlands being subjected to a terrorist attack.[35] The level is determined on the basis of a non-exhaustive list of factors that sometimes differ between levels.

The various threat levels are regarded by the NCTV as bandwidths without any hard dividing lines. For this reason there may be fluctuations in the "nature, scope and background of the threat, without there being any reason to opt for a different general threat level".[36] It is notable that the level 'critical' is different in many respects from the other three levels.

The category 'critical' relates to a concrete indication that an attack will take place or a situation in which an attack has just taken place. The other three levels concern the extent to which an unknown or known threat has come about. As mentioned above, the dividing line between them is not especially hard but moves between conceivable to predictable and from an unknown to a known threat based on the extent to which more concrete information is available on developments, possible perpetrators, targets, and so on. Practical experience over the past ten years has shown that only two of the four levels are used: 'limited' and 'substantial', as shown in the analysis of ten years of the DTN below.

33 "*Website geeft informatie over terreur*", De Volkskrant, 19 September 2005.

34 Abels, "*Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland*", p.542.

35 National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (NCTV), DTN vs. ATb, consulted on 24-11-2015, https://www.nctv.nl/onderwerpen/tb/dtn-atb.aspx.

36 National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (NCTV), *Opbouw 4 dreigingsniveaus*, consulted on 24-11-2015, https://www.nctv.nl/ onderwerpen/ tb/dtn/opbouw/. See also appendix III.

4 Ten years of the DTN – an analysis

In this chapter we consider the content of the forty public summaries of the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands published between May 2005 and November 2015. What were the central themes? What was regarded as being a threat? Which new phenomena and terms were discussed and applied to describe the threat? In this chapter we will provide a summary of the development of ten years of the DTN, specifically addressing the following themes: a comparison of DTNs 1 and 40, use of terminology, the who and what of the threat, raising and lowering of the threat, and the specific cases of CBRN terrorism, Salafism, foreign fighters and resistance.

2015: 2005, but ten years later?

Ten years ago, in 2005, when the first Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands was published, Europe was undergoing a turbulent period. The previous year had seen the terrorist attacks by Al Qaida in Madrid, in which nearly two hundred people lost their lives. In Netherlands feelings were running high about the attack of Theo van Gogh in 2004 and concerns about polarisation. The attacks in London took place two months after the publication of the first DTN. The threat of international jihadist networks with a strong 'home-grown' component was a serious cause of concern in the next threat assessment. This centred on the "transnational interweaving of both local and international networks, the international aspect of the jihadist battle zones such as that in Iraq, and the implications of the attacks in London.[37] Now, ten years later, the sad fact is that little appears to have changed: we can now simply add Syria to Iraq, and these days it is the implications of the attacks in Paris rather than those in London that are causing most concern.

This would at first sight seem to suggest continuity, with the attacks in Paris being 'merely' another chapter in the development of jihadism in Europe. But when we consider the small number of large-scale terrorist attacks that have taken place in the past decade, this does not chime with reality. Moreover, the most deadly attack that took place in Europe between 2005 and 13 November 2015 had nothing to do with a jihadist network or individual, but concerned a person of a completely different order: the right-wing extremist terrorist Anders Breivik, who murdered almost eighty people in Norway in 2011. In the meantime the threat level has been raised and lowered again on a number of occasions: From 'substantial' in DTN 1 to 'limited in DTN 8 (March 2007), to 'substantial' in DTN 12 (March 2008) to 'limited' in DTN 19 (November 2009), only to be raised again to 'substantial in DTN 32 (March 2013) (See figure 3.) The threat in Europe and - accordingly- that in the Netherlands, has in some cases taken on different forms and been given a different scope, in much the same way as the policy.

DTN 1 and DTN 40: a comparison

Before summarising the development of the DTN during the past ten years, we first make a comparison between the first and most recent DTN (DTN 40). The first impression is that there are strikingly abundant similarities. The emphasis in DTN 1 is placed on the "Islamic terrorist threat"[38], whereas DTN 40 focuses more on the "jihadist threat", where only a different term is used for a similar phenomenon. Another similarity is that both DTNs make reference to the return of jihadists from conflict areas. In DTN 1 these people are referred to as "Iraq jihadists", while DTN 40 speaks of "Dutch-speaking jihadists in Syria and Iraq". DTN 40 adds to this that a threat is posed not only by those who travel abroad for jihadist purposes but also by those who choose instead to remain in the Netherlands.

Despite that, there are a number of differences to be found. It is stated in DTN 1 that the threat to the Netherlands is inextricably linked with international developments, where Dutch participation in the Afghanistan mission contributes to a high international profile. It is also stated that the current threat is still in fact found mainly in local networks.[39]

DTN 40 centres not so much on local networks but more on the threat posed by the terrorist organisation Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). It is noted that this could have to do with both national and international networks and with lone actor terrorists.[40] DTN 1 closely addresses the theme of radicalisation. It states that "radicalisation could contribute to terrorism and successful recruitment". It is noted that the motives for young people to radicalise have shifted from a link with the conflict areas to a general aversion to the West, which has been intensified by the actions of the Netherlands in Afghanistan and Iraq.[41] It is also asserted that the radicalisation process within the Muslim communications is fed by the "xenophobia and in some cases racist attitude and acts of violence of right-wing groups of young people".[42] The rise in hostility could lead even to "moderate Muslims" defining their identity more strongly in religious terms.[43] DTN 40 also pays a relatively large amount of attention to the development of right-wing extremism. This is being caused mainly by the refugee crisis and the attack on a mayoral candidate in Germany.

37 NCTV, Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands 2, p.1. Reading guide: from this point onwards this will be abbreviated to "DTN + number".

38 DTN 1, p.2.

39 DTN 1, p.2.

40 DTN 40, p.1.

41 DTN 40, p.1.

42 Idem, p.3.

43 Idem, p.3.

Form and use of terminology

Another notable difference between DTN 1 and DTN 40 is the form. There has been a clear shift in the scope of the description of the threat and of the measures. In DTN 1 the threat assessment takes up two pages, and the details of the policy and measures in that area covered no fewer than fourteen. In DTN 40 the public summary has been reduced to five pages, and the measures are no longer included as part of the DTN. Since DTN 32 the policy implications have in many cases been placed in a separate document.

If we compare the use of terminology in DTN 1 and DTN 40 we see that there are a number of interesting differences (see figure 2). Words such as 'terrorism', 'counterterrorism' and 'terrorist' are used a total of eighty times compared with just six in DTN 40. Also, the first DTN mentioned measures more than twenty times, whereas this arose only once in DTN 40. Another striking difference is that the term 'jihadists' or 'jihadist' was not in the vocabulary of the first DTN, but was used as many as 33 times in the most recent DTN. Finally, it will come as no surprise that ISIS occupies a central position in DTN 40: after "the Netherlands" it is the most commonly used word (50 times). This gives an indication of the extent to which our current threat assessment, also just before the attacks in Paris, is related to the developments concerning ISIS.

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Figure 2 **Use of terminology in DTN 1 and DTN 40**

Words[44]	Number	Number	Total
the netherlands	26	36	62
isis	0	50	50
threat	16	19	35
parliament	32	1	33
nctb	32	0	32
attacks	11	20	31
terrorism	27	2	29
terrorist	25	4	29
counterterrorism	28	0	28
attack	15	11	26
measures	23	1	24
minister	24	0	24
syria	0	24	24
approach	20	1	21
information	20	0	20
jihadist	0	19	19
west	3	14	17
eu	16	0	16
european	12	4	16
possible	8	8	16
persons	9	7	16
resources	15	0	15
jihadists	0	14	14
dutch	7	7	14
police	13	1	14

General impression of ten years of the DTN - levels

The above analysis was no more than a brief comparison of DTN 1 and DTN 40. Between them there were another 38 DTNs, and all sorts of developments in the area of radicalisation and terrorism. Given below is an analysis of all forty DTNs. We start by discussing the levels: what threat levels have been operated throughout the years, and how were the changes to the levels explained? The threat level has changed four times since the first DTN in 2005 (see figure 3).

....
44 Not including articles and irrelevant verbs, without capitals, with the aid of the software program Atlas.ti.

Figure 3 **Threat levels over the course of years**

DTN number	Date of publication	Level
DTN 1 to DTN 7	May 2005	Substantial
DTN 8 to DTN 11	March 2007	Limited
DTN 12 to DTN 18	March 2008	Substantial
DTN 19 to DTN 31	November 2009	Limited
DTN 32 to DTN 40	March 2013 - present	Substantial

Following the initial 'substantial' level, it was lowered twice to 'limited' and raised twice to 'substantial'. It is interesting to note how this change is worded. In DTN 8 of March 2007 it is explained that the threat level is being adjusted downwards owing to the reduction in the concrete domestic threat, the non-concrete nature of the potential threats (to which we will return later) and the increased amount of resistance in the Muslim community.[45] It was added to the explanation of this lowering of the level that this would have no direct implications for concrete security measures and that nor should this have any such implications, since another system is operated to determine the measures.

In DTN 19 of November 2009 it seems almost as though the NCTV is troubled by this lowering of the level and that the coordinator sees the need to provide an especially clear explanation of which implications this does and does not have. The reason for lowering the threat level in DTN 19 is that the Netherlands is less in the spotlight of the international jihadist networks and that the domestic networks have been relatively peaceful "for a number of years now".[46]
It is stated in the concluding paragraph of DTN 19 that this is "not so much the final classification of the threat (the threat level), but an underlying periodic outline of the threat-relevant developments forming the substantive basis of the Dutch counterterrorism policy", which immediately qualifies the importance of the threat level.[47]
It is also added that this lowering of the level does not imply that the development of policy will come to a halt and that it is not known how long this level can be maintained. When the threat level is raised, as in DTN 12 for example, no such passages are found. All that is explained is why the threat level has been raised (increased predicta-bility) without mentioning the potential implications. When the level is raised in DTN 32 nothing about this is mentioned in the public summary either.

Another notable point about the levels is that there is not always much apparent difference between the DTNs for the level 'limited' and those labelled 'substantial'. There are also question marks concerning the level bandwidths. In the early years of the DTN the term 'substantial' 'was linked to a situation that appears a good deal less threatening that the current level with the same label'.

[45] DTN 8, p.2.

[46] DTN 19, p.1.

[47] Idem, p.4.

In December 2008 coordinator Tjibbe Joustra appears himself to indicate that there are big differences in the bandwidth 'substantial' when he uses the term 'substantial plus' when referred to DTN 15.[48]

Focus

What were the threats that occupied a central position in the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands during the past ten years, and where did they come from? An initial observation is that the DTN has focused very sharply on the jihadist threat from the very beginning. Given the background to the realisation of the DTN there is a good explanation for this: in 2004 and 2005 the threat of jihadist terrorism in Europe was greater than ever before. Despite that, this lessened greatly in the period from 2007 - 2013 in particular, while the DTN focused just as specifically on the threat of jihadism. During the first years of the DTN the focus is placed mainly on international or local networks. The threat of a lone actor terrorist is added in DTN 20 (April 2010). According to the levels operated the threat in the Netherlands is initially regarded as being strongly dependent on the presence and organisational strength of domestic jihadist networks. But plenty of attention is still paid to developments concerning jihadism outside of the Netherlands. The DTN often makes mention of what is happening with Al Qaida (up until 2013) and more recently ISIS as well. Precisely how those developments affect the domestic threat is not always clear, although it is explained on several occasions that the threat in the Netherlands is derived largely from the international threat.

This focus on jihadism is especially notable in some threat assessments. The biggest attack in the period from 2005 - 2014 was carried out in July 2011 by right-wing extremist Anders Breivik. The following DTN 26 opens by observing that the threat level in the Netherlands remains limited and that the threat of jihadist networks remains low, that the resistance against violent radicalism and terrorism remains as high as ever and that Dutch jihadists make (often unsuccessful) attempts to travel to jihadist combat areas. It is only then that it is pointed out that the attacks in Norway "show that the domestic terrorist threat in Western countries is not only determined by jihadist terrorism. There also other ideological convictions that can manifest themselves in terrorist violence".[49]
But this is immediately followed by the sentence that the "most important component of the threat to the Netherlands and its interests (...) remains the international jihadist threat".[50]
Although the DTN then goes on to discuss the attacks in Norway, it is notable that even following almost eighty fatalities from different quarters the DTN is virtually exclusively about jihadism.

As pointed out in the previous paragraph, raising or lowering the threat level has been linked without exception to developments

[48] NRC Handelsblad "*Joustra: terreurdreiging Nederland groter dan ooit*". 3-12-2008, http://vorige.nrc.nl/binnenland/article2081327.ece/Joustra_terreurdreiging_Nederland_groter_dan_ooit.

[49] DTN 26, p.1.

[50] Idem, p.1.

concerning jihadist terrorism. By way of illustration, in March 2007, in DTN 8, the threat level was lowered because the domestic jihadist networks were being increasingly weakened and the Muslim community was showing growing resistance. In recent years the emphasis has shifted strongly towards international networks, perhaps owing to the absence of domestic jihadist networks. It is stated in DTN 26 that "the most important component of the threat to the Netherlands and its interests (...) remains the international jihadist threat".[51] It is interesting to note that this not only concerns the presence of networks or individuals, but also phenomena such as 'radicalisation' and 'resistance'. This is in fact always about radicalisation and resistance in the Dutch Muslim community. In DTN 8 it is decided to lower the threat level owing (among other things) to the increased resistance among this population group. It is also notable that in some DTNs the threat level is linked directly to certain occurrences. DTNs 12 to 15 make frequent reference to the announcement and launch of the film Fitna of the PVV party leader Geert Wilders.[52]

As well as the threat from the jihadist angle, other types of threat are sporadically addressed. This is reflected mainly in developments concerning left- and right-wing extremists and animal rights activists. The organisational capacity of these groups is generally regarded as being low. Also, the activities of these groups generally only barely pose a security threat. In DTN 18, for example, it is noted that there have been only few violent incidents involving animal rights extremists. Organisations such as the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) were however involved in false bomb alerts.[53] There were also "skirmishes" between animal rights activities of left- and right-wing extremists, but it did not amount to much more than that.[54] In most cases these incidents were placed under the heading of political activism because they did not involve violence against people.

There was however a single case involving a potential security threat. DTN 9 reports that it has once again proved important to recognise extreme right-wing violence: "incidents showcase the growing self-confidence and violent tendencies of the extreme-right in the Netherlands as well as the polarisation between dissidents in the Netherlands".[55] It is stated in the next threat assessment that there has been an increase in the number of reports of right-wing extremism, but that the use of violence has remained relatively "stable", but without really explaining the level and seriousness of that use of violence.[56] It is however reported that fourteen "inter-ethnic" acts of violence were perpetrated by or against young people, in which right-wing extremists were the aggressors in most cases.[57]

It is added to this that of the larger group of people only "a few hundred are actually affiliated with an extreme right-wing party or group such as Blood and Honour".[58] But this does appear to be a very large group, about which the threat assessment comments that the high level of "xenophobic and nationalistic ideas and utterances against Muslims, people of a different skin colour and Jews among large groupings form a matter of concern".[59] However this theme is not followed up to any great extent in subsequent threat assessments.

The threat assessment and incidents

Although there has been little terrorist-related violence in the Netherlands during the past ten years, there have been some incidents in the Netherlands and Europe that have affected the Dutch security situation. For these incidents we have consulted the reports of Europol, the EU Terrorism Situation & Trend Report (TE-SAT) and the incidents involving fatalities reported in the Global Terrorism database of Maryland University.[60] How are these incidents reflected in the DTNs?

The first DTNs were released at a time when terrorists were causing a great deal of commotion in the Netherlands and the rest of Europe with the attacks in Madrid and London and the murder of Theo Van Gogh in the Netherlands. A lot of attention was therefore also paid to the presence of local and international jihadist networks in the first threat assessments. The launch of Wilders' film Fitna in 2008 was covered in detail in several DTNs, for example. DTN 13 points out that the film led to the international profile of the Netherlands being raised, but that the adverse effects have remained limited and that the Islamic community in the Netherlands had in fact shown resistance. Most of the jihadist attacks and plots in the Netherlands and Europe, and even in the United States, are directly reflected in the DTNs. They report, for example, on the "Fort Hood Shooting", the "Christmas Day Bomber", the "Stockholm Bomber", the plot in Germany to blow up trains, the attack on the American military base in Germany, the failed attack on a cartoonist in Denmark, and, in recent years, the attacks on the Jewish Museum in Copenhagen, Charlie Hebdo and the failed attack on the Thalys train. In response to a number of plots in the United States around 2009 it is reported that the situation demonstrates the "multiformity" of the international terrorist threat.[61] But it is noted at the same time that there is a "decline in home-grown terrorism in the Netherlands, whereas home-grown American terrorism is increasing".[62] The NCTV has identified a shift from violence perpetrated by lone actor terrorists in the US to more organised networks. Despite this, the Netherlands

51   Idem, p.2.

52   see for example page 1 of DTN 14.

53   DTN 18, p.5

54   Idem, p.5.

55   DTN 9, p.3.

56   DTN 10, p.3.

57   Idem, p.3.

58   Idem, p.3.

59   Idem, p.3.

60   For Europol, EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT), see https://www.europol.europa.eu/latest_publications/37en and for GTD see National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, Global Terrorism Database, http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/.

61   DTN 20, p.2

62   Idem, p.3.

needs to take account of the "the wide-ranging radicalisation of lone actor terrorists", especially in the light of the Islam debate and the possibility of mounting polarisation".[63]

However, non-jihadist violent or terrorist incidents are much less clearly reflected in the threat assessments. A case in point is the incident on Queen's Day in 2009 when Karst Tates drove a car into a crowd with the intention of harming members of the Royal Family. Despite the political motive of this act, which is also attested to in the last words of Karst Tates, this incident was not labelled as "terrorism". This was however registered as such in the Global Terrorism Database.[64] This attack resulted in 7 civilian fatalities: the attack with the highest number of civilian victims in the Netherlands. For that reason it is notable that the incident is not even mentioned in DTN 17, labelled as terrorism or otherwise. It is not until DTN 28, published in March 2012, that this is mentioned. This was in response to the shooting in Liege a few months previously by somebody without any clear political motive. This threat assessment mentions both Karst Tates and Tristan van der Vlis, the perpetrator of the shooting in Alphen aan de Rijn in 2011, in which there were six fatalities. Both perpetrators were placed under the heading of "violent lone actors".[65]

Nor did the attack of Anders Breiivik as mentioned above give cause to open the DTN with something other than the jihadist threat. Another example is formed by the terrorist activities of the Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund (NSU) under Beate Zschäpe. These activities led to at least ten fatalities, which caused great commotion in Germany. Very little attention was paid to this grouping in the DTN. The first mention of this was made a few months after Zschäpe was arrested in November 2011. DTN 28 (March 2012) reports that "ten unsolved murders, most of which involving people Turkish nationality in the period from 2000 – 2006 were committed by the Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund (NSU), a right-wing extremist group".[66] No mention was made of the criticism of the German intelligence and security services, claiming that they had focused too much on the threat of jihadism and that right-wing extremists had slipped through the net as a result of this.

Forms of threat

Although the threat assessments are fairly clear about the ideological background of the threat - in most cases jihadism, but also left- and right-wing extremists and animal activists - the type of threat faced by the Netherlands is not always clear. A wide range of threats are considered: the known threat and the unknown threat, the predictable threat, the potential and concrete threats, and the domestic and international threats.

DTN 8 explains how this works. A type of threat is the concrete threat, also known as the known threat: the "threat identified by the security authorities at network or personal level. Since it seemed that the concrete threat in the Netherlands was declining, based in this case on the reduced presence of domestic jihadist networks, the focal point of the threat considerations shifted to the potential threat".[67] The potential threat, also known as the conceivable threat, is defined as "given the experiences of 11 September 2011, a threat manifestation that cannot be ruled out but for which the security authorities do not have any concrete indications".[68] How this is worded is remarkable. It seems as though in the absence of concrete indications and direct developments giving cause for concern, one thinks more in terms of what is possible, or what could possibly come to pose a threat. Ultimately it was decided after all to lower the threat level in DTN 8. This was because (among other things) "it did not prove possible to firm up potential threats" and resistance among Muslim groups had intensified.

There are of course a number of practical problems involved in charting the unknown threat. What resources are available to estimate the seriousness and scope of a threat if the threat itself is unknown? All that can be done in the case is to consider the possible implications of a certain type of attack. This mainly covers certain "low-probability, high-impact" scenarios, such as an attack using CBRN weapons. A difficult situation arises here when it comes to a threat analysis in which it is precisely the capability and intent of an actor that have to be estimated.[69] It becomes very difficult to estimate this for an unknown threat when it is not known where the attack could come from. These "low-probability, high-impact" scenarios therefore lend themselves better to a risk assessment. DTN 8 makes it clear that it is difficult to attach certain conclusions to an "unknown" threat: as soon as it fails to manifest itself it disappears from the scene. The NCTV ultimately bases the threat level on the concrete threat, with concrete indications. Despite this it is sometimes the unknown threat that takes centre stage, where the conceivability of a certain attack - can we imagine this happening here? - takes precedence over a specific attack - is this likely or expected to take place?

A concrete example is DTN 12 of March 2008, in which the threat level is raised to "substantial". The DTN reports that "there are currently no concrete indications of attacks in the Netherlands".[70] None the less, "during the course of DTN12 (...) the increased conceivability of an attack in the Netherlands identified in DTN 10 and DTN 11 is continuing to rise".[71] Despite a lack of concrete

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[63] Idem, p.5.

[64] National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, GTD ID 200905010021, consulted on 24-11-2015, http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/IncidentSummary.aspx?gtdid=200905010021.

[65] DTN 28, p.4.

[66] DTN 28, p.4.

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[67] DTN 8, p.2.

[68] Idem, p.2.

[69] For more information about the capability and intent of 'home-grown' terrorists in general and the Netherlands in particular, see Bart Schuurman and Quirine Eijkman, 2015, "Indicators of terrorist intent and capability: Tools for threat assessment", Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict, pp. 1-17.

[70] DTN 12, p.3.

[71] Idem.

indications or developments it is the predictability of an attack that leads to a rise in the threat level. Added to that is the fact that it is also the "increase in the unknown threat, i.e. that posed by people or groups that are not yet in the sights of European Intelligence and Security Services" that contributes to the decision to raise the threat level. Reference is made in this regard to cases in surrounding countries in which it was not until a very advanced stage that perpetrators came into the picture or were not known to the security services.

The first question to be answered here is how it can be established that the unknown threat to the Netherlands has increased. Can this be attributed solely to the increased conceivability of such a threat? And what criteria are operated for the decision to raise the threat level despite the absence of signs of a concrete terrorist threat against the Netherlands? Placing the emphasis on the unknown threat does of course always offer a way out if a threat suddenly manifests itself: that was the unknown threat that we had already been warned of.

CBRN terrorism

A notable example of a specific threat placed mainly in the domain of the "predictability" or the 'low-probability, high-impact' category is what is known as CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear) terrorism. This form of terrorism hugely captures the imagination because the potential damage could be disastrous. Up until now terrorists have only barely succeeded in making use of CBRN weapons. Despite that, this is a regularly recurring theme in the DTNs. DTN 5, for example, mentions that in the autumn of 2005 a "Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Terrorism" steering committee was set up with the aim of reducing the likelihood of a CBRN attack and setting up a dedicated CBRN terrorism threat assessment.[72] In most of the DTNs a fairly down-to-earth approach is taken to the potential threat of CBRN terrorism. In DTN 7, for instance, mention is made in passing that "in the short term a greater risk is posed by home-made explosives than CBRN weapons".[73] But DTN 9 states that "the chance of chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) weapons being used in an attack in the Netherlands is judged, as in 2006, to be small but present. The most likely scenario is a small-scale chemical or biological attack aimed at individuals or a small group of people in an enclosed space".[74] CBRN terrorism is mentioned once again in DTN 15. In this DTN it is stated that "in view of the disproportionate impact of a CBRN attack, there is and remains a need for a coordinated approach at national level, aimed at minimising the chance of CBRN terrorism".[75]

Salafism

Salafism is another important theme covered by various DTNs . The variable attitude to this orthodox movement within Islam is a notable aspect of this. DTN 6 sets out five factors that contribute to the ongoing radicalisation of Muslim youths in the Netherlands. One of these factors is the growth of non-violent Salafism in many mosques.[76] This is also reflected in DTN 14, in which an explanation is given in the chapter on "resistance" of how the "moderate mosques" are gaining ground in respect of the Salafists.[77] Conversely, DTN 18 highlights the positive side of Salafism as a non-violent counterpart of jihadism. The next DTN makes specific reference to the heightened resistance of Salafist centres, which are becoming more and more likely to bar entry to "radical youths with jihadist ideas.[78]

Foreign fighters

A theme that has occupied a high position on the agenda since the raising of the threat level in DTN 32 of March 2013 is that of "foreign fighters", or "foreign terrorist fighters" This has been reported on in detail throughout the years, with the number of Dutch civilians fighting in Syria and Iraq being regularly updated. A lot of attention is also paid to potential 'returnees'. It is however interesting to note the extent to which this theme was previously an issue. The use of terminology on this theme is shown in figure 4, ranging from possible expressions from "Iraq jihadists", "Syria volunteers" to simply "foreign fighters". This shows that the phenomenon has been in the picture since the very first threat assessment and that this always recurs a couple of times throughout the years, but that the big rise took place after March 2013.

Resilience

Another theme that arises in the threat assessments is resilience and resistance. Paul Abels highlighted this as an important subject because "the extent to which a government, society and specific population groups are willing and able to offer resistance to certain threats also affects the threat itself".[79]

This resistance is not a constant factor but varies throughout the years. The first threat assessments were not especially positive on the subject of resilience, especially the resilience of the Muslim community in the Netherlands when it comes to resisting radicalisation. A positive trend was gradually established here, which is expressed in DTN 3, for example, as "on the resistance side the increase in resilience among Muslims appears to be continuing. Some mosques showed themselves to actively oppose radicalisation".[80] This resilience continues, and is therefore given in DTN 8 as one of the most important reasons for lowering the threat level. In the
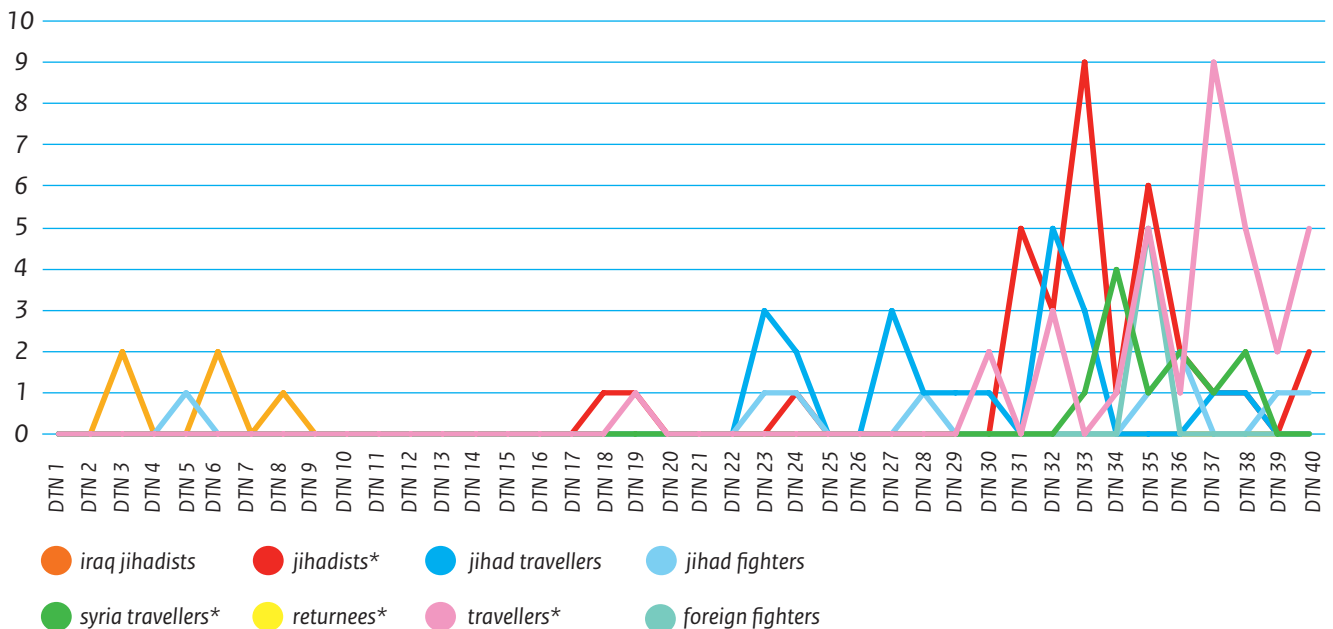
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[72] DTN 5, p.13.

[73] DTN 7, p.1.

[74] DTN 9, p.1.

[75] DTN 15, p. 8.

[76] DTN 6, p.2.

[77] DTN 14, p. 4.

[78] DTN 15, p.3.

[79] Abels, "*Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland*", p. 538.

[80] DTN 6, p.6.

Figure 4 **Use of terminology concerning "foreign fighters". Terms marked* have been merged with comparable terms.**

Legend:
- iraq jihadists
- jihadists*
- jihad travellers
- jihad fighters
- syria travellers*
- returnees*
- travellers*
- foreign fighters

years to follow we frequently find the following sentence: "resistance among the Dutch population to violent radicalism, extremism and terrorism remains as strong as ever."

After December 2012 there is a change in tone: DTN 31 warns against the fact that there has been a reduction in the attention paid to issues concerning radicalisation and terrorism in Dutch society.[81]

Six months later, in DTN 33, the NCTV no longer speaks of resilience that is "as strong as ever".[82] This DTN asserts that the Dutch population "remains generally resilient".[83] DTN 35 states that there are no signs that resilience has significantly reduced, but that there are "worrying signs that resilience in Muslim communities is being increasingly placed under pressure".[84] In DTN 36 this even changes to "concerns about resilience in the Muslim population in the longer term".[85]

After DTN 36 resilience appears to rise again in the Netherlands. Mention is again made of the fact that the Dutch population is "generally" resilient. However, a critical comment can be made on this subject. Although resilience is referred to in general terms, it is

only the resilience of the Muslim community that is specifically considered. When mention is made of right-wing extremism, for example, nothing is said about the resilience among groups that could be sensitive to this. DTN 10 forms a concrete example in which worrying signals about right-wing extremism are described. It is stated in this DTN that "just a few hundred youths" are linked to extreme right-wing parties such as Blood and Honour.[86] One would then expect to see a passage concerning the resilience of native Dutch youths in relation to right-wing extremist influences, but this is not forthcoming.

Use of terminology

Having considered a number of the substantive lines of the threat assessments, we turn now to the use of terminology in DTNs over the past ten years. Figure 5 shows the cumulative use of terminology in these forty DTNs.[87] As we would expect, we see the words "the Netherlands" and "threat" at the top of this list. The various terms concerning the phenomenon of jihadism are more notable. The words "international", "countries" and "European" are high up on the list and indicate that the DTN is strongly internationally oriented.

[81] DTN 31, p.2.

[82] DTN 33, p.2.

[83] DTN 33, p.2.

[84] DTN 35, p.6.

[85] DTN 36, p.7.

[86] DTN 10, p.3.

[87] Not including articles and irrelevant verbs, without capitals, with the aid of the software program Atlas.ti.

If we then considered the words "Islam", "Islamic", "Muslims" and "jihadist" we see that the use of "Islamic" has remained fairly constant, the use of "Muslims" has reduced during the past five years and the use of the word "jihadist" has risen sharply since DTN 16. It should be emphasised that there are sometimes big differences between the DTNs. It is notable that the word "Islamic", which frequently occurred in DTN 1, appears to have been replaced in most cases thereafter with the term "jihadist" (see figure 6).

Figure 5 **Use of terminology in DTN 1 - 40**

Words	Number in DTN 1
the netherlands	1201
threat	588
jihadist	581
dutch	476
terrorism	470
parliament	448
terrorist	418
international	361
jihadists	354
radicalisation	338
attacks	330
countries	314
counterterrorism	297
nctb	282
attack	266
networks	251
qa'ida	236
measures	235
european	230
persons	227
approach	217
europe	207
internet	206

Figure 6 **Use of the words "islamist", "islamic", "muslims" and "jihadist"**

islamist   islamic   muslims   jihadist
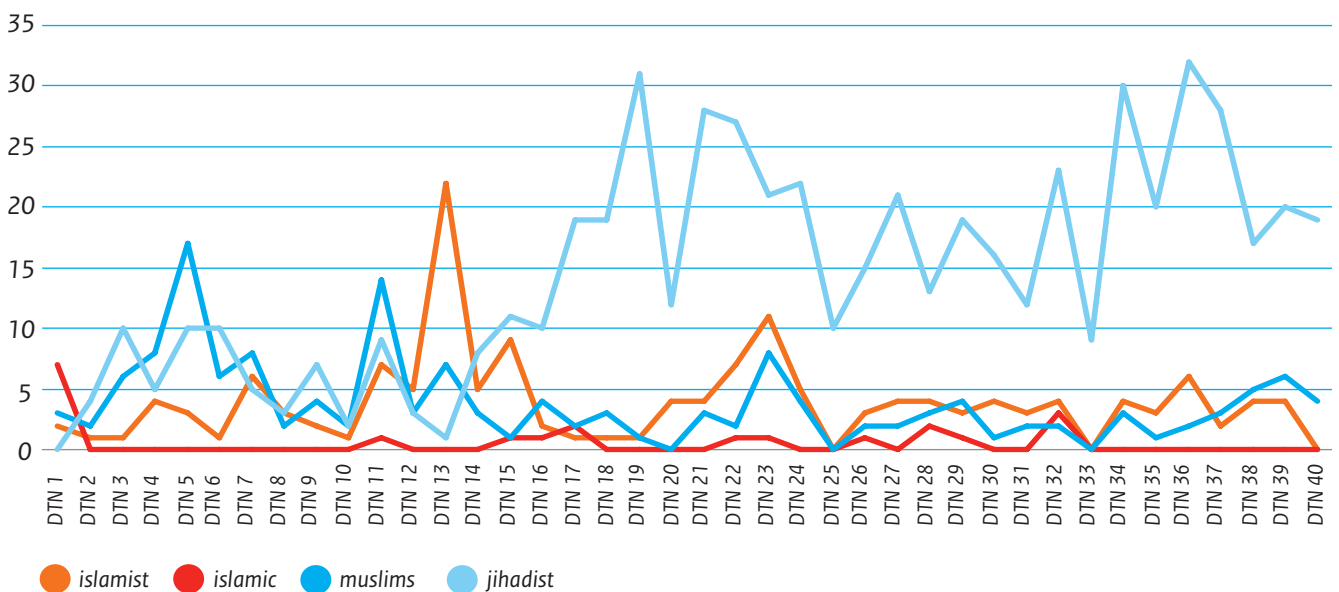
5 Developments surrounding the DTN

Figure 7 **Number of official announcements**

Number of official announcements
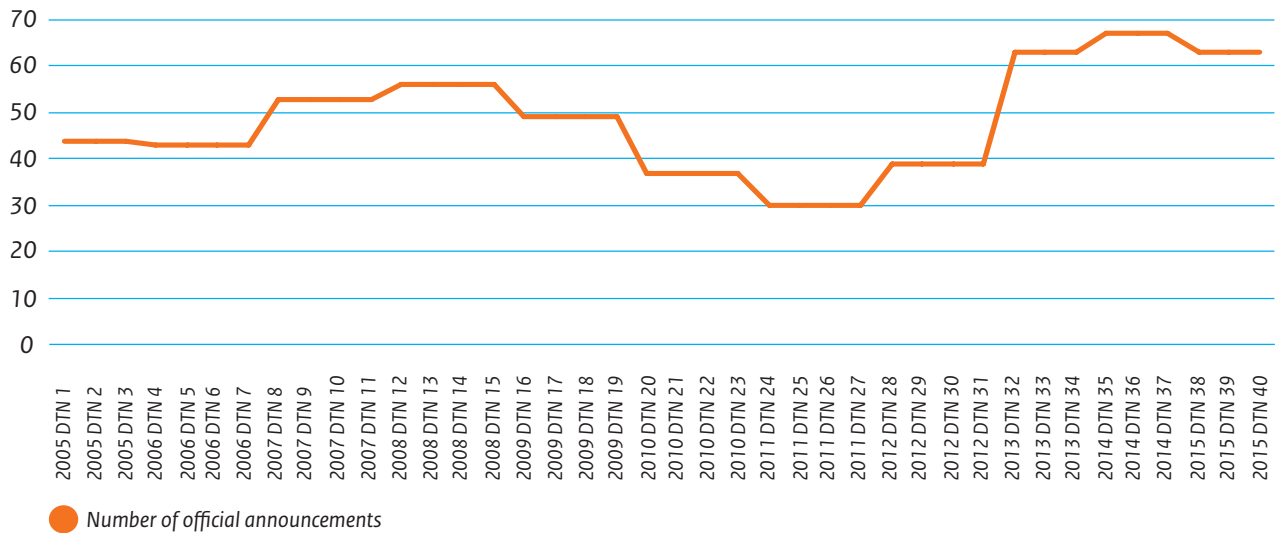
In the previous paragraphs we considered the content of ten years of DTNs. However, much has also happened surrounding the DTN. The first DTN was published in a different political and administrative setting and with a different coordinator from DTN 40. During the past ten years there have been three different national coordinators who served under different governments and worked for different ministers. From 2005 to 2007 the responsible ministers were from the CDA and VVD, between 2007 and 2010 from the CDA and PvdA and from 2010 the NCTV was led by various VVD ministers (see appendix I). The first DTN was drawn up by the NCTb, a relatively small governmental agency manned by counterterrorism specialists. From October 2012 this was the NCTV, which was responsible not only for the counterterrorism policy, but also for a wide range of other security issues, ranging from crisis management in general to cyber security. There was also a change in the positioning of the NCTb/NCTV. In 2010 there were two responsible ministers: the Minister of Justice and the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. From 2010 this was the minister of the 'new' Ministry of Security and Justice. There was more continuity regarding the coordinators themselves: The first coordinator, Tjibbe Joustra, headed the NCTb for five years. His successor, Erik Akerboom, held this position for almost four years. The third coordinator, Dick Schoof, will shortly be starting his fourth year. The coordinators have thus provided continuity in a rather changeable political and administrative setting.

Within that setting the DTNs also played an important role in the political debate on terrorism and counterterrorism. In the period from the end of 2006 to 2009 and after 2012 the DTNs were paid a lot of attention in the House of Representatives and in various parliamentary documents and government papers. Figure 7 shows

the number of official announcements[88] between May 2005 and November 2015. The fall in the number of announcements after 2009 appears to be linked to the lowering of the threat level in November 2009 and the recent increase in the number of announcements to its elevation in the spring of 2013.

DTN in the news

As touched on above, the DTNs have received a lot of media attention. The same applies to the author of the DTN, the coordinator. The person of the NCTb/NCTV has developed into a public figure since 2005. It is hard to find an example of a top civil servant with a higher public profile. This person thus plays an important role in communicating on the terrorist threat and the explanation of the DTN to the general public. During the past ten years the three coordinators have been guests more than once on well-known and popular TV programmes such as NOVA/Nieuwsuur or Buitenhof. They have also been frequently quoted in the written media and various newspapers of record such as NRC Handelsblad, Volkskrant and Trouw have published comprehensive interviews with the coordinators. One of the interviews that caused a degree of controversy concerning the DTN was the farewell interview of coordinator Tjibbe Joustra with NRC Handelsblad in December 2008: In this interview he said that the threat level was higher than ever. He even referred to it as "substantial plus", and also said that compared to the situation three years ago, when the level was also

[88] Based on the results from a database of Overheid.nl with the official announcements (*Staatscourant, Staatsblad, Tractatenblad, Gemeenteblad, Provinciaal blad, Waterschapsblad, Blad gemeenschappelijke regeling*) of the government and the parliamentary documents. Searched under "Dreigings-beeld terrorisme Nederland" https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/.

"substantial", he was also forced to conclude that "the issues now underlying this are actually more serious". [89]

The form, usefulness and need for the DTN were also addressed during the launch of the threat assessment and in the recent debate on threat levels. Shortly following the publication of the first DTN, for example, NRC Handelsblad published an article on the role played by the NCTb regarding providing citizens with information on terrorism.[90]

This showed that experts are divided on the question of whether the government should or should not keep the public informed about terrorism. Some took the view that this could cause anxiety, whereas others argued that a reticent approach on the government's part could be dangerous.[91] That debate also took place concerning the concept of threat assessments following the elevated terrorist threat in Brussels. The announcement of level 4 - 'very serious' in the Brussels-Capital Region led to the metro being closed down, events being cancelled and many restaurants and cafés remaining closed in response to fears of an attack. The Volkskrant responded to this by organising on 21 November 2015 an online opinion poll with the following proposition: "the placing of the terrorist threat in 'levels' is unnecessary and does nothing but cause panic." Of the more than three thousand respondents, 47% agreed with this proposition and 53% disagreed.[92] Although this is an online poll, it shows that the public seems divided on the usefulness and need for a threat level, and that this could present a challenge regarding how such levels are communicated.

[89] Ahmet Olgun, "Gevaar, hoe ziet dat eruit?", NRC Handelsblad, 30-07-2005, http://vorige.nrc.nl/dossiers/moslimterreur/politiek_reacties_en_beleidtot0/article1868324.ece.

[90] Olgun, "Gevaar, hoe ziet dat eruit?".

[91] Idem.

[92] De Volkskrant, "Terreurdreiging Brussel naar hoogste niveau", 21-11-2015, http://www.volkskrant.nl/buitenland/terreurdreiging-brussel-naar-hoogste-niveau~a4191909/.

6 Conclusion and reflection

Ten years after the publication of the first Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands this global analysis of the terrorist threat is a subject of close scrutiny. Threat analyses and threat estimates have drawn a great deal of media attention since the attacks in Paris in November 2015 and the announcements of 'level 4/'very serious' for Brussels. The DTN, in some cases supplemented by Parliamentary Letters[93], has become the government's principal means of communication regarding radicalisation, terrorism and counter-terrorist measures. We have given below a brief summary of the most important findings of the study of the threat assessments over the past ten years and the features of the DTN in itself. Finally, we reflect briefly on the future of the DTN.

Focus on jihadism

The analysis of the DTNs themselves shows that the key issue is the jihadist threat and, increasingly, 'foreign fighters'. It is also clear that the threat levels depend mainly on extent to which domestic jihadist networks are present, but also that developments abroad play a major role. The threat level also depends on the degree of resistance within Muslim communities. There have been changing attitudes to Salafism throughout the course of years: sometimes it is regarded as a factor that contributes to radicalism, and sometimes it is described as a non-violent counterpart of jihadism. Other forms of extremism or terrorism are paid relatively little attention, and right-wing extremism in particular sometimes appears to be somewhat trivialised.

What is it?

When we consider the form of the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands a simple question, but one that is very hard to answer, arises: what exactly is the DTN? Is it an impression of the threat as the Dutch word 'dreigingsbeeld', or 'threat image', would imply - a qualitative description of the threat - or a 'threat assessment' - a proper assessment of the threat - as it is termed in English?

There is no straightforward answer to this question. The DTN contains elements of both. A threat level is attached to the qualitative description of the threat, which also gives the DTN the characteristics of a threat estimate. It is usually somewhat unclear how that description relates to the threat level. This could be a conscious choice. After all, when the DTN was brought into being it was emphasised that it was not the intention to create an impression that the threat could be quantified. For that reason it was decided to operate just four, rather than five or more levels as is done in other countries. The underlying idea of this was that operating just a few categories with a wide bandwidth would rule out the suggestion that the threat could be quantified.

This field of tension or ambiguity between whether we want to quantify the threat is clearly reflected in the various DTNs. DTN 3, for example, mentions that a "weighting" is applied between the various factors, ultimately leading to a certain threat level.[94] Reading between the lines we see that this consideration ultimately comprises two important components: the threat on the one hand and the resistance against it as a mitigating factor on the other.[95] However, nowhere is an explanation given of what weighting is assigned to which factors and how this resistance could actually affect the threat level. The authors of the DTN appear thus to want to distance themselves from making a threat estimate. But including resistance in the analysis and linking threat levels to the DTN makes the DTN more than a threat assessment alone.

If we consider the current debate on the classification 'substantial' for the current threat level, we see that many people regard the DTN as being mainly a threat estimate rather than an 'image' of the situation. This is not made any clearer by the fact that the DTN is referred to in English as a threat assessment, as opposed - as touched on above - to the Dutch term that could literally be translated as 'threat image'.

Criteria

The operation of certain threat levels would have to meet at least two conditions. First, as with any form of categorisation, the levels have to follow on logically from each other, with each higher level representing a clear rise in one or more of the accompanying properties or criteria. This would also have to actually say something about the intention and capacities of individuals or groups to perpetrate an attack and about the resistance referred to in the DTNs. This is unclear, at least to the reader of the public version. But the list of criteria given on the NCTV website (see appendix III) gives rise to many questions. It is notable, for example, that some criteria (e.g. the presence of national and international terrorist networks) are mentioned for only one of the levels. There are also doubts about the value of certain criteria. The absence of new trends or phenomena that pose a threat is not in itself a reason to operate a threat level 'limited'. It could just as well be true that an existing group has been carrying out terrorist activities for years and is still doing so. It is also interesting to note that a resistance factor suddenly makes its entry at level "minimal": the "open society". How exactly an open society could affect the chance of success of a plot hatched by an individual or small group is unclear. This is usually better explained in the threat assessments themselves, but the reader none the less sometimes finds himself having to guess which criteria are most applicable at the moment and which are not really relevant when it comes to determining the threat level.

Four or more levels?

Regarding the number of threat levels the question is whether just four of them gives the NCTV enough space to categorise the complex and ever-changing threat. Furthermore, in practice only two rather than four levels are operated: the level "minimal" - although theoretically possible - will hardly ever be used in practice. It is possible that the level "critical" will only be used following an attack if one of the perpetrators or known accomplices are still at large. This is illustrated by recent events in Brussels. This means that in practice there are only two usable levels: "limited" and "substantial". The question remains of the extent to which these two categories are sufficient to reflect the considerable movement in the terrorist threat to the Netherlands. When Tjibbe Joustra referred to a "substantial plus" level in 2008 he appeared to be indicating that the boundaries of this level's bandwidth had been reached and the term "substantial" sometimes no longer covers the situation. As mentioned above, the level 'critical' is of a different order in view of the criterion "very strong indications". This gives rise to the question of whether at least five levels are needed to better categorise the bandwidth of the terrorist threat in general. Following the British example, the category 'severe' could be inserted between 'substantial' and 'critical'.

Added value of the levels

The question ultimately boils down to precisely how valuable the threat levels are. If the main purpose of the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands is to provide an impression of the threat rather than a estimate of the threat, it is questionable whether it is advisable to link the threat levels to this image. Setting levels, whether four or forty, suggests that the threat is quantifiable, and that proves very difficult in practice. The government could therefore decide to abolish the threat levels. This would bring an end to debates about whether a given threat fits within the bandwidth of a threat level. A DTN without threat levels would also make it possible to give a detailed explanation of the direction in which the threat is moving. The downside is that this would do away with the ability to inform the general public of how serious the threat is in a single word or a couple of sentences. This also makes it possible to give a range of politicians and 'experts' the ability to label the threat image and, accordingly, to further politicise the terrorist threat.

Communication

That takes us to a final and important objective of the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands: the DTN as a means of communication. The public version of the DTN is undoubtedly a successful instrument for informing the public and the House of Representatives about the terrorist threat against the Netherlands and Dutch interests abroad. It is given a lot of media attention and is read by many. The NCTV's website statistics show that there has been a gradual rise in the number of visits to the DTN website and the current threat level, especially following terrorist incidents and changes to the threat level.[96] The number has risen sharply over the past few years. The number of visits to the DTN page and the page showing the current threat level in particular shot up following the raising of the threat level in March 2013. This year the number of visits rose to more than 11,000 visits in November 2015.[97]

Apart from this increased interest, the question remains of the extent to which the DTN and the threat levels contribute to mentally preparing the public for counterterrorist measures and the possibility of an attack. Nor is it known whether more attention being paid to the DTN leads to a rise in alertness and/or whether members of the public and companies see actual perspectives for action in the DTN. It is also unclear whether the DTN contributes to increasing the resilience of the public, the business community and public authorities, or whether this ultimate leads to unnecessary concern or even more fear of terrorism. The fact that the Netherlands is at times the country most fearful of terrorism in Europe - despite the relatively small number of terrorist incidents in its own territory - makes this question even more pressing.[98] It also goes to show how difficult it is to communicate threats, certainly in situations where several and exceptionally bloody attacks take place in surrounding countries.

The future

There have now been no fewer than forty editions of the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands over a ten-year period. One would expect the form and nature of the DTN to have changed 'substantially' over the years, certainly given the many political and administrative changes affecting the authors of the DTN and the turbulent times in which we live. It is therefore perhaps one of the most striking observations when reading forty DTNs that, in fact, not very much has changed. Not only regarding its nature and form, but even regarding the essence of its content.

This continuity contributes on the one hand to the recognisability and familiarity of the DTN as a means of communication, and makes the threat assessment a constant factor as a "substantive basis and guideline" for the Dutch counterterrorism policy. On the other hand, the societal, political and administrative context in 2015 could give cause to once again carefully consider whether the threat assessment and the related threat levels need to be changed, and whether the tenth anniversary is a good point at which to do this.

[96] NCTV visit statistics website page "Dreigingsniveau Terrorisme Nederland" and page "Actueel dreigingsniveau".

[97] Idem.

[98] See, for example, the six-monthly Eurobarometer of the European Commission.

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Appendix I: Coordinators, Governments and Responsible Ministers

Coordinators:

- 2004 - 2009: Tjibbe Joustra
- 2009 - 2012: Erik Akerboom
- 2013 - present: Dick Schoof

The NCTb/NCTV dates back to 2004 and has served under the following governments:
- Balkenende II (CDA, VVD, D66)
- Balkenende III (CDA, VVD)
- Balkenende IV (CDA, PvdA, CU),
- Rutte I (VVD, CDA)
- Rutte II (VVD, PvdA).

Up until 2010 the Ministers of Justice and for the Interior and Kingdom Relations were responsible for the coordinator, this has the Minister of Security and Justice since 2010. From 2004 to 2007 the responsible ministers were from the CDA and the VVD, between 2007 and 2010 from the CDA and the PvdA, and from 2010 to the time of writing the VVD provided a Minister of Security and Justice twice, see the chart below.

Year	Coordinator	Government	Responsible
2004	Tjibbe Joustra	Balkenende II (CDA, VVD, D66)	Ministers of Justice and the Interior and Kingdom Relations *CDA- VVD*
2005	Tjibbe Joustra	Balkenende II (CDA, VVD, D66)	Ministers of Justice and the Interior and Kingdom Relations *CDA- VVD*
2006	Tjibbe Joustra	Balkenende III (CDA, VVD)	Ministers of Justice and the Interior and Kingdom Relations *CDA- VVD*
2007	Tjibbe Joustra	Balkenende IV (CDA, PvdA, CU)	Ministers of Justice and the Interior and Kingdom Relations *CDA- PvdA*
2008	Tjibbe Joustra	Balkenende IV (CDA, PvdA, CU)	Ministers of Justice and the Interior and Kingdom Relations *CDA- PvdA*
2009	Erik Akerboom	Balkenende IV (CDA, PvdA, CU)	Ministers of Justice and the Interior and Kingdom Relations *CDA- PvdA*
2010	Erik Akerboom	Rutte I (VVD, CDA) - Support PVV	the Minister of Security and Justice *VVD*
2011	Erik Akerboom	Rutte I (VVD, CDA) - Support PVV	the Minister of Security and Justice *VVD*
2012	Erik Akerboom	Rutte II (VVD, PvdA)	the Minister of Security and Justice *VVD*
2013	Dick Schoof	Rutte II (VVD, PvdA)	the Minister of Security and Justice *VVD*
2014	Dick Schoof	Rutte II (VVD, PvdA)	the Minister of Security and Justice *VVD*
2015	Dick Schoof	Rutte II (VVD, PvdA)	the Minister of Security and Justice *VVD*

Appendix II:
Distinction between DTN and ATb

	Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands	Alert system for counterterrorism
For whom?	Citizens, companies and public authorities	Government and business sectors
Objective	Gives a general impression of the potential threat in the Netherlands: how likely is it that a terrorist attack will take place somewhere in the Netherlands? Serves for information purposes and for policy development by the government	Provides a specific impression of the potential or actual threat in a certain business sector or a certain area. Intended to be able to quickly put security measures in place in the event of an elevated threat
Threat levels	• Minimal • Limited • Substantial • Critical	• Basic level • Slight threat • Moderate threat • High threat
Threat applicable to	The whole of the Netherlands, not place-related: how likely is it that our country will face a terrorist threat?	Related sector in which a threat has been identified
Measures	The DTN is too general to take security measures based solely on it	Depending on the threat level a package of security measures is put in place, both by the sector and the government

Source: https://www.nctv.nl/onderwerpen/tb/dtn-atb.aspx/.

Appendix III: Structure of the four threat levels

Level	Some accompanying criteria
Minimal	• There are barely any national or international terrorist networks • It is unlikely that attacks are being planned • This level is maintained by the open society and the nature of the risk of a modern society
Limited	• No new trends or phenomena that present a threat have been identified • The activities of terrorist networks have been hindered • The Netherlands is not or is only barely mentioned in the statements of terrorist networks that can be taken seriously
Substantial	• New trends and phenomena that present a threat have been identified • There is a realistic chance of an attack taking place in the Netherlands • Attacks are taking place in other countries similar to the Netherlands • Radicalisation and recruitment are taking place on a considerable scale • The Netherlands is frequently mentioned in the statements of terrorist networks that can be taken seriously
Critical	• There are strong indications that an attack will take place in the Netherlands • An attack has taken place in the Netherlands and subsequent attacks are very likely • The Netherlands is frequently mentioned in the statements of terrorist networks that are taken very seriously, and a serious threat is posed to specific targets

Source: https://www.nctv.nl/onderwerpen/tb/dtn/opbouw/.

Notes

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