

## **Intermediate conclusion III: how to fight jihadist terrorism**

Of the three clusters, the jihadist cluster is the most consistent one, both in counterterrorism principles that were applied and in their outcomes. The application of the research design to the two cases in this cluster showed that the counterterrorism principles that were used in these two cases were largely the same, and that the effects were very similar. With regard to the research subquestion about the relation between counterterrorism effectiveness and terrorist actor type, this comparison clearly generated findings on the basis of which one can argue that such a relation indeed exists. Given the research results, it is possible to discern a counterterrorism approach that may work against terrorist movements that resemble the Dutch and British jihadist movements. What should certainly be taken into account when drawing up such an approach, is that both the UK and the Netherlands put much effort into addressing the root causes of the jihadist threat, but were most successful in the application of counterterrorism principles that are clearly located towards 'harder' end of the counterterrorism spectrum.

First, both movements saw their violent actions thwarted by intelligence services. MI5, the British security service, disrupted several plots by bugging the cars and homes of suspected terrorists who were thought to be close to the execution of a terrorist attack. It is true that some plots escaped the attention of MI5, but many – though not all – of these displayed a certain amateurism and were generally small in scale. It is true that we can only speculate about the plots that were foiled, but the Christmas Bomb Plot, the 2006 liquid bomb plot and the plan to kidnap and kill a British Muslim soldier, were more professional and would almost certainly have had a bigger impact than many attacks that did reach the execution stage. The Dutch intelligence and security service AIVD, too, was well-informed about the attack plans that were being hatched by the country's most dedicated and resolute terrorists. Samir Azzouz's attack plans were known before he could carry them out, as were the Hofstad Group's plans for a terrorist attack in Portugal. The AIVD made a fatal miscalculation with far-reaching consequences when it

underestimated Mohammed Bouyeri's willingness to commit a terrorist attack. Nevertheless, this one instance, fateful as it may have been, should not distract us from the overall record of the AIVD's knowledge of the Hofstad Group and the cell around Samir Azzouz.

The second counterterrorism principle that contributed to the fight against the jihadist movements that have been examined in the chapters 8 and 9 was 'law enforcement and direct action'. In the UK as well as in the Netherlands, the jihadist movement was weakened by the arrest and expulsion of terrorist cell members and their inspirators. In the Netherlands the arrests of the Hofstad Group members and the expulsion of some thirty men, most of whom were authority figures of the cells in which they were active, dealt the jihadist movement a blow from which it never recovered. After these arrests the Dutch jihadist movement fell apart and failed to make a single serious attack plan. The impact of the arrests of jihadist movement members in the UK was less detrimental, but still considerable. The British jihadist movement was a lot larger than its Dutch counterpart and was thus better able to absorb the losses. Nevertheless, British jihadists moved underground and had a harder time making elaborate attack plans that involved large groups of contributors and training missions to Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Another striking similarity between the two cases concerns two counterterrorism principles that did not apply. On various occasions, the Dutch and British governments violated the rule of law and displayed a lack of restraint in the use of force. But contrary to the common wisdom in counterterrorism studies, there was no backlash in the form of growing active support or sympathy, for the jihadist movement. The overreaction and heavy-handedness by the state were perhaps not as violent as in other cases, but Muslims in both countries did feel they were unduly targeted by counterterrorism legislation and police actions. Interestingly, though, there were no escalations of the terrorist campaigns, as the Muslim communities in both countries did not take the step from discontent over police performance and discriminatory counterterrorism

to the idea that political violence was necessary to bring about the introduction of a fundamentalist version of sharia law.

In the outcomes of the applications of these three principles, the lack of popular support was a decisive factor. The arrests undermined the movements because there was, unlike in cases where terrorist groups can count on the support of the population, no one who was willing to take up the role of arrested movement members. In neither case was there was a popular response that allowed the jihadist movements to keep their operational capabilities up to par. If we would try to turn these findings into a generalisable counterterrorism profile, kinetic means would be the profile's cornerstone, as the evidence from this cluster suggests that terrorist actors that are isolated from the population can effectively be fought with repressive tools such as law enforcement pressure and various intelligence gathering methods. Also, on the basis of these two cases we can hypothesise that, when applying such kinetic tools, there is less risk the situation might be exacerbated, since the chances that the population will rally behind the terrorist actor are small.

