

POLITIETS EFTERRETNINGSTJENESTE
DANISH SECURITY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE



The Roots of Terrorism in Europe

Copenhagen
2-3 May 2005

S U M M A R Y



Dear participants at the Conference “The Roots of Terrorism in Europe”.

As promised at the end of the conference, PET has prepared a summary of the contributions given at the conference. The summary is an attempt to maintain the essence of some of the thoughts, ideas and reflections expressed during the two days of gathering in May 2005. It should therefore not be considered an exact or exclusive account of the contributions and discussions presented at the conference.

Once again, I would like to thank you for your participation in and contributions to this conference and I look forward to hosting the next conference.

Lars Findsen
Director General

SUMMARY

On 2nd and 3rd May 2005, the Danish Security Intelligence Service, PET, for the second time in the Service’s history organised and hosted an international conference. The theme of the conference was “The Roots of Terrorism in Europe”. The aim of the conference was to contribute towards increasing the level of knowledge and information concerning the roots or growth potential of terrorism seen in a European context, also applying to Danish conditions. On the basis of the theme of the conference, a number of Danish and international distinguished speakers gave their contributions to the problems and issues concerning Islamic radicalisation and terrorism.

The conference primarily appealed to politicians, police officers, researchers, civil and public servants, Danish and foreign intelligence and security officers as well as journalists and representatives from the Muslim societies in Denmark. The objective of the conference was firstly to gather a circle of persons, who are directly or indirectly involved in the problems and issues concerning Islamic radicalisation and terrorism, secondly to contribute towards establishing, maintaining and extending relations between persons, specific authorities and institutions within this field on the national as well as international level.

It was the main impression that the above objectives were achieved.

It is generally believed that radicalisation is an essential element in the roots of terrorism and it is therefore necessary to gain an insight and knowledge of radicalisation in order to strengthen the preventive efforts within this field. The speakers at the conference contributed with expert knowledge and many problems and issues were discussed and gave rise to productive thoughts and considerations for further activities.

The natural basis of the conference was the development seen in some of the Muslim societies in Europe during recent years. Some Islamic circles seem to have confined themselves and as such established a kind of “parallel societies” to the societies in which they are living. In these circles there seems to be an increasing degree of radicalisation, a trend that is worrying, needless to say.



With a view to providing material for discussion and reflection at the conference and onwards, Director General Lars Findsen opened the conference and presented three questions to the participants:

- Why and when does radicalisation start?
- When is radicalisation expressed?
- How do you consider the possibilities of fighting the roots of terrorism, when these roots are part of our own society?

In general, the speakers at the conference agreed that time had come to stop thinking that Muslims constitute a homogeneous community dissociating itself from Christian Europeans. No two Muslims in Europe are identical. Muslims have different preferences; they have different ways of believing and like all others they have different backgrounds. Some are born in Europe others come from various countries and cultures outside Europe. “Muslims are not just Muslims” as one speaker expressed it clearly, but rather “people of Muslim descent”.

It soon became clear at the conference that a Muslim background is not tantamount to an identity solely defined on the basis of religion. Bearing this clear point in mind, a speaker also underscored that the contact to people of a Muslim background should not only be made through their religious leaders, as they are not the only representatives of the Muslim societies.

Furthermore, it was emphasised that radicalisation is not an inherent element of Islam – that the Koran is not in itself radical and “the Koran does not read itself” as pointed out by a participant. The introduction also indicated that the theme of the conference was not Islam but on the contrary radicalisation. It was therefore quite crucial to the conference in general that it is the radical interpretations of Islam – as interpreted by human beings – which are worrying. This point of view obtained general support.

The issue of why radicalisation is expressed was a natural central issue in many of the contributions and discussions. Several speakers spoke of how important it is that our democratic society has an obligation to be inclusive in respect of all ethnic groups in society – also ethnic groups of Muslim origin – which are natural parts of all European societies in today’s world.

In a democratic society founded on pluralism, cultural diversity must be tolerated. The strength of any democratic society lies in the diversity itself and the following compromises. During the debate about inclusion, it was also underlined several times that inclusion must be a two-way process. It is not only a question of making the old European societies accept and include ethnic groups of Muslim origin at all levels of society – these groups must also be willing to participate and contribute to society. In this connection it was repeatedly illustrated that participation in European societies of people of Muslim origin by no means require assimilation but only that these persons actively express that they want to become part of the general society.

If faced with exclusion or demands of assimilation, the persons may very well feel alienated and start searching for their own identities. This in turn leads young people into letting themselves be seduced by radical interpretations of Islam that provide simple answers to the complicated matters of life. A speaker



drew attention to this issue by stressing that the special Muslim identity, which some young choose, is partly a result of these young people feeling that they do not belong to the world where their parents come from and that they have not been invited into the societies of which they are formally part. They therefore seek alternative identities and then more young apparently choose to join specific Muslim identities that emerge from radical interpretations of Islam. At the same time, they thus signal that they are in sheer opposition to the society which they feel that they are not part of and never will be part of.

In order to avoid this alienation and the problems deriving thereof, several speakers pointed out that it is important to maintain a constant dialogue between all parts of our society. In continuation of what was previously advanced about people of Muslim origin, it was underlined that dialogue with the Muslim circles should not be limited to a dialogue with the religious leaders. If kept as a restricted dialogue, a large part of the Muslim ethnic group, who are not represented by virtue of their religious affiliation, will be neglected.

Actually, all the speakers, each considering it from different angles, focused highly on the dialogue, which is so essential, and a prerequisite of a healthy and safe society. It was clear that the demand for dialogue also meant that in democratic societies there should be no limitations as to what can be discussed and criticised. Obviously it should therefore be legitimate to criticise religious views. The alternative is, as expressed by a speaker, that religion will be elevated and obtain a special status and as such religious leaders will be put above democracy.

On the other hand, it was also made clear that religious views must be legitimate political views which was also one of the conclusions of the 2003 conference "Terrorism – Challenges and Possible Consequences". At the recent conference, one of the speakers pointed out that when the Islamic groups or movements are included in the political process they would feel more responsible for the development of society and for the problems of the everyday. On the contrary when these persons deliberately are kept beyond influence they are given a platform from where they can spread their messages and recruit supporters always referring to the fact that the society is not interested in people like them. Therefore inclusion is also in this regard a crucial element.

Another speaker brought into focus the fact that people in Europe of Muslim origin need role models; they need persons who, by virtue of their positions, activities etc., can show alternative roads for the Muslims who are looking for an identity. Several role models will contribute towards reducing the alienation and thus increasing the affiliation with the societies in which they live.

The general considerations with regard to countering the conditions, which may lead to radicalisation, are far from being mere abstract reflections. This was made clear when a speaker presented a number of terror cases in which persons from Europe were involved. Several motivational factors applied to the persons who had been radicalised voluntarily and later on been recruited to local terrorist cells. The social conditions for the individual, including the group to which the person in question belonged, often played a significant role. The feeling of being left out, of not belonging, had among other things made these people look for alternative roads.



Radicalisation has, however, also other motivational factors as clearly expressed at the conference in general but also from the cases presented. Particularly global conditions play an important role which several speakers indicated. Several international conflicts apparently contribute towards radicalising the Muslims in Europe who were neither born nor grew up in the areas where the conflicts are. For example it was mentioned that al-Qaida has regularly been legitimising its point of views and actions on the basis of the experienced injustices committed against Muslims in e.g. the Israel/Palestine conflict and Iraq. A solution of these conflicts alone will not eliminate the terror problems but will most likely contribute to eliminating the appeal of the terrorist groups as it will become much more difficult for them to legitimise their point of views and particularly their acts.

The overall message from the speakers at the conference was that the causes and solutions to the problems concerning radicalisation are three-dimensional with regard to a personal, a group-related and a global dimension. None of the speakers gave the impression that there are easy solutions to the problems of radicalisation, however, it was clear that a lot of actions could be taken at the national as well as European levels. Such efforts and activities would also contribute towards dampening the effect of the global motivational factors.

As expressed by one of the speakers very forthrightly: people in harmony don't become terrorists.

Another issue which might have surprised a little at the conference was that non-violent groups should not be neglected as being unimportant, rather on the contrary. Non-violent groups can contribute to radicalising and verbally legitimising terrorist acts. If not directly, then indirectly. Non-violent groups that at first glance seem harmless may, as expressed by a speaker, on this basis turn out to be some of the most dangerous kinds. The groups contribute to fertilising the grounds for further radicalisation and ultimately recruitment for terrorism purposes. It is therefore very essential to be particularly attentive of these trends.

In this connection it was once again highlighted that dialogue with moderate Islamists and a high degree of involvement of people of Muslim origin may contribute towards putting a damper on the impact which the more extremist non-violent groups may exert.

In conclusion, the conference brought out many relevant points and issues into the light. In the future these points and issues will contribute to balance and inspire the discussions about and the initiatives to be taken against the roots of terrorism within the sphere of the security services as well as in the rest of society.



PRESENTATION OF SPEAKERS

LENE ESPERSEN

Minister of Justice.

LARS FINDSEN

Director General of PET.

AHMED ABU-LABAN

is an influential Imam practising in Copenhagen, Denmark. Born in Palestine and educated as a mechanical engineer in Egypt. Ahmed Abu-Laban became interested in religious affairs while working in Kuwait and started practising as an Imam in 1975. Arriving in Denmark in 1984, Ahmed Abu-Laban became a central figure in the Islamic Belief Society. Among other activities, Ahmed Abu-Laban is a counsellor for MUNIDA (Muslim Youth in Denmark) and co-author of a report on the social and psychological conditions of immigrants in Europe. In addition, Ahmed Abu-Laban is a member of the Co-ordination Council of Imams in Europe.

DR JØRGEN BÆK
SIMONSEN

is Director of the Danish Institute in Damascus and is a Professor, Dr Phil, at the Carsten Niebuhr Institute, University of Copenhagen. Dr Bæk Simonsen holds degrees within the fields of history, religion, Arabic and obtained a doctor's degree in 1988. He has carried out extensive work in the fields of political Islam, political systems in the Arabic world, Middle Eastern history as well as within Islam and Muslims in Denmark. His latest publication was the book "Islam med danske øjne. Danskeres syn på islam gennem 1000 år" (Islam with Danish eyes – the interpretation of Islam in the Danish public in a millennium).

DR GILLES KEPEL

holds degrees in Arabic, English and Philosophy, a diploma from the Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris (IEP) and doctorates in sociology and political science. He is a Professor at the IEP, where he heads the post-graduate programme on the Arab and Muslim worlds. He was Visiting Professor at N.Y.U. in 1994 and at Columbia University in 1995-96.

Dr Kepel is author of several publications on Islamic extremism of which his recent book "Jihad – the Trail of Political Islam" was published in 2002. He has also carried out extensive research on Islamic movements in the Middle East and in Europe.

DR THOMAS SCHEFFLER

is a guest lecturer at the Carsten Niebuhr Institute, University of Copenhagen. He is Professor of Political Science at the Freie Universität Berlin and a Rockefeller Visiting Fellow. Based on extensive research in the region, Dr Scheffler has conducted a case study of Lebanon, entitled "Dynamics of Violence-Dynamics of Peace? Religious Hierarchies and the Domestication of Violence in Lebanon". Dr Scheffler has also carried out extensive research on the ideology of Osama bin Laden and other militant Islamist groups.

NIELS BRINCH

is a senior reporter and journalist specialized in covering legal affairs, defence and foreign policy. Since 1980 Niels Brinch has focused on covering national and international terrorism. As a journalist he has covered wars and conflicts in the Middle East and the Balkans. From 1988 he has worked for the Danish national TV-channel TV2.



EDWARD OAKDEN

Director, Defence and Strategic Threats, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO.

PETER NESSER

is a researcher at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI). He is experienced within the fields of social sciences, Middle Eastern studies, Arabic and history and holds a master degree from the University of Oslo. Among others he has interviewed leaders from the Muslim Brotherhood in Cairo. His latest publication is “Jihad in Europe. Exploring the Sources of Motivation for Salafi-Jihadi Terrorism in Europe post-millennium” and “The slaying of the Dutch filmmaker – Religiously motivated violence or Islamist terrorism in the name of global Jihad?” which is about the slaying of the author Theo van Gogh. He is now working on a project on “Jihadism in Western Europe after the invasion of Iraq”.

AZZA KARAM

is Senior Policy Research Advisor at the United Nations Development Programme, in the Regional Bureau for Arab States. Her experience spans the fields of multi-religious collaboration, international gender issues, democratisation, human rights, conflict, and political Islam. She has worked in the Middle East (Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Yemen) as well as in Europe (the Netherlands, Sweden and Northern Ireland).

**HANS JØRGEN
BONNICHSEN**

Commander, Head of Operations, PET.



MONDAY, 2 MAY

PROGRAMME

- 08:45 h Shuttle Bus Service from Copenhagen Admiral Hotel
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- 09:00 h Registration
- 10:00 h Introduction by **Lene Espersen, Minister of Justice**
- 10:15 h Welcome and introduction by **Lars Findsen, Director General, PET**
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- 10:40 h Coffee break
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- 11:00 h Islamic radicalization and integration in Denmark – **Ahmed Abu-Laban, Imam**
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- 12:00 h Lunch
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- 13:15 h Islam and Islamophobia in Europe – **Dr Jørgen Bæk Simonsen, The Danish Institute in Damaskus**
- 14:15 h Islamic radicalisation in Europe – **Dr Gilles Kepel, Institut d'Études Politiques, Paris**
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- 15:15 h Coffee break
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- 15:35 h Terrorism motivated by a radical interpretation of Islam – **Dr Thomas Scheffler, Freie Universität Berlin**
- 16:35 h Panel debate moderated by **Niels Brinch**
- 17:30 h Closing remarks by **Niels Brinch**
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- 18:00 h Departure from PET
- 19:30 h Shuttle Bus Service from Copenhagen Admiral Hotel
- 20:00 h Dinner

Shuttle Bus Service from Brøndsalen

TUESDAY, 3 MAY

- 09:00 h Shuttle Bus Service from Copenhagen Admiral Hotel
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- 09:45 h The roots of terrorism seen from a British perspective – **Edward Oakden, Director, Defence and Strategic Threats, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, FCO**
- 10:45 h Jihad in Europe – **Petter Nesser, Norwegian Defence Research Establishment**
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- 11:45 h Lunch
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- 13:00 h Religion and politics in Europe – **Dr Azza Karam, United Nations Development Programme**
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- 14:00 h Coffee break
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- 14:15 h The roots of terrorism seen from a PET perspective with focus on Islamic radicalisation. **Hans Jørgen Bonnichsen, Commander, Head of Operations, PET**
- 15:15 h Panel debate moderated by **Niels Brinch**
- 16:15 h Closing remarks by **Lars Findsen**
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- 16:30 h Shuttle Bus Service to Copenhagen Airport and Copenhagen Central Station