



Assessment of the Terror Threat against Denmark

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Summary

CTA assesses that there is a general terror threat against Denmark intensified by the high prioritisation of Denmark as a terrorist target by militant extremist groups. There are groups and individuals in Denmark who wish and have the capacity to carry out acts of terrorism in Denmark by using simple means. Additionally, there are indications that groups abroad also seek to send terrorists to Denmark.

Furthermore, CTA assesses that there is a considerable and acknowledged terror threat against Danes and Danish interests in certain parts of the world, including North, West, and East Africa, the Middle East as well as in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The terror threat against Denmark primarily comes from networks, groups and individuals who adhere to a militant Islamist ideology. This includes not only al-Qaida-related groups and networks based in Denmark and abroad but also other foreign militant Islamist networks.

The reprinting of the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in February 2008 led to an increased focus on Denmark and Danish interests as potential terrorist targets among leading militant extremists abroad. It is CTA's assessment that the reprinting continues to be used ideologically and as a propaganda tool by e.g. al-Qaida. Statements from e.g. leading al-Qaida members emphasise al-Qaida's strategic focus on Denmark and help to retain the focus of militant extremists on Denmark and Danish interests.

Terrorist groups are constantly seeking to draw lessons from previous terror attacks and to develop new and surprising types of attacks, making them difficult to predict. The terrorist attack in Mumbai in November 2008 is an example of such an attack as is the unsuccessful attack against a flight from Amsterdam to Detroit in December 2009.

It is, however, important to note that the risk of becoming a random victim of a terrorist attack in Denmark or abroad remains very limited, except in certain conflict areas.

The threat against Denmark

In recent years, Denmark and the rest of the Western World have experienced an increase in the terror threat. CTA assesses that there is a general terror threat against Denmark intensified by the high prioritisation by militant extremists of Denmark and Danish interests as potential terrorist targets. There are groups and individuals who wish to carry out acts of terrorism in Denmark.

Especially the reprinting of the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in February 2008 led to an increased focus on Denmark – also among leading militant extremists abroad. Among such extremists there continues to be a wish to carry out acts of terrorism against Denmark and against Danes and Danish interests abroad.

The terror threat against Denmark primarily comes from networks, groups and individuals who adhere to a militant extremist ideology. This includes not only al-Qaida-related groups and networks based in Denmark and abroad but also other foreign militant Islamist networks.

Furthermore, experience from recent years in Denmark and other European countries shows that militant extremists, to a large extent, are young men born and raised in the West. Often, they have undergone a radicalisation process in which the Internet, established extremist ideologists and charismatic persons in combination with friends and personal networks have played an important role.

In March 2008, the al-Qaida leader Osama Bin Laden condemned the cartoons, and on 4 September 2008, al-Qaida published a lengthy video addressing, among other issues, the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed and the suicide attack on the Danish Embassy in Pakistan on 2 June 2008. In September 2009, Denmark and the former Danish Prime Minister and current NATO Secretary General Mr. Anders Fogh Rasmussen were mentioned in a video published by al-Qaida in September 2009 in connection with the anniversary of the attacks on 11 September 2001. And most recently, in October 2009, Osama Bin Laden's video speech from March 2008 was reissued with German subtitles.

Thus, the reprinting is continuously being used ideologically and as a propaganda tool by al-Qaida. Statements from leading al-Qaida members and related groups emphasise al-Qaida's continued strategic focus on Denmark and help to retain focus from militant extremists on Denmark and Danish interests. There has been a tendency that the focus on Denmark increases whenever comparable cases which are perceived as a provocation against Islam have appeared in other countries.

CTA assesses that the capacity to carry out an act of terrorism with relatively simple means is present in Denmark. At the same time, CTA assesses that certain circles in Denmark possess the specific will to carry out acts of terrorism.

This is for instance illustrated by the terror-related attack on cartoonist Kurt Vestergaard on 1 January 2010, and the case from Copenhagen in which two defendants received lengthy prison sentences in October 2008, and by the terrorist cases from Vollsmose and Glostrup in which a number of individuals also in 2007 received lengthy prison sentences for carrying out terrorist activities.

There are individuals in Denmark with links to militant groups or individuals abroad. Furthermore, individuals from Denmark have also gone to conflict zones in the Middle East, Asia and Africa in order to receive militant training or take part in hostilities against e.g. an international military presence and local authorities. It is possible that some of these individuals may return to Denmark and apply their skills to continued terrorist-related activity. The perpetrator behind the attempted attack on cartoonist Kurt Vestergaard may be an example of this.

Furthermore, there are individuals and networks in Denmark that contribute to the financing of terrorist groups abroad.

The threat against Danes and Danish interests abroad

There is a considerable and acknowledged terror threat against Danes and Danish interests in certain parts of the world, especially in places where persons or interests may easily be recognised as being Danish. This especially applies to regions where al-Qaida-related groups are active; including particularly countries in North, West and East Africa and the Middle East as well as in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

As illustrated by the al-Qaida attack on the Danish embassy in Pakistan on 2 June 2008, Danish diplomatic representations or other obvious Danish targets may be particularly exposed to the threat of terrorism.

In recent years, there has been a number of terror-related abduction cases around the world. This is the case in Afghanistan and Pakistan as well as in certain parts of the Middle East and North, West and East Africa. CTA assesses that the increased focus on Denmark from militant extremist groups may also result in the targeted abduction of Danes in certain parts of the world.

In spite of the increased terror threat against Danes in certain parts of the world, CTA assesses that the primary threat against Danes abroad stems from the fact that Danes tend to stay in places where there are other Westerners. Generally speaking, such places may be potential terrorist targets as seen with the attack on the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, Pakistan, on 20 September 2008.

Potential targets

The increased counter-terrorism efforts by the authorities in recent years have made it more difficult to strike high-profile protected targets.

Experience from abroad shows that terrorists have preferred carrying out attacks against public transportation. This is due, not least, to the fact that this is an easily accessible target where a lot of people are closely gathered. Furthermore, attacks against public transportation and traffic hubs as well as hotels, malls and public areas have a major psychological effect on the public since these are locations where large segments of the population come regularly and therefore may see themselves as potential targets.

As the unsuccessful terror attack against a flight from Amsterdam to Detroit in December 2009 shows, there is a continued interest among terrorists to hit the air traffic.

There have also been examples of attacks against targets with a symbolic or political value. CTA assesses that targets in Denmark with a symbolic value for terrorists may include public authorities, or individuals and companies linked to the Cartoon Case.

There are relatively few examples of militant extremists who consider critical national infrastructure in the West, such as the energy and transport sectors, targets in themselves.

Methods

Terrorist attacks may occur without any prior intelligence indicating such attacks, i.e. without warning. This was e.g. illustrated by the attacks in Madrid in 2004 and in London in 2005.

Terrorists often use home-made bombs in their attacks. There are examples that larger bombs with considerable blast power are used, and that relatively well-protected locations may become the target of an attack. The terrorist attack against the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad in September 2008 exemplifies this trend.

Terrorists have also used other methods in the execution of terrorist attacks, including the use of small arms and abductions. In connection with the terror attack against multiple targets in the Indian city of Mumbai in November 2008 small arms were used as the primary weapons in combination with several bomb explosions.

Simple attacks against unprotected or lightly protected symbolic or political targets, including individuals, are an obvious modus for terrorists who do not have comprehensive support structures. Such attacks may be carried out with limited means and little planning and training. The attack on cartoonist Kurt Vestergaard is an example of this.

Terrorist groups are constantly seeking to draw lessons from previous terror attacks and to develop new and surprising types of attacks, making them difficult to predict. The terrorist attack in Mumbai in November 2008 is an example of such an attack as is the unsuccessful attack against a flight from Amsterdam to Detroit in December 2009.

Although there has been a growing risk of terror in recent years, it is important to note that the risk of becoming a random victim of a terrorist attack in Denmark or abroad remains very limited, except in certain conflict zones.