



Assessment of the Terror Threat against Denmark

October 27 2009

Summary

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

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.

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.

Terrorist attacks may occur without any prior intelligence indicating such attacks, i.e. without warning.

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 increased focus from militant extremists on 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 has 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.

In March 2008, the al-Qaida leader Usama 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. Most recently, 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 September 11 2001.

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

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.

CTA assesses that militant groups are attempting to send terrorists to Denmark.

Furthermore, CTA also 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 most recent terrorist case from Copenhagen in which two defendants received lengthy prison sentences in October 2008, but also 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, there is a risk that individuals from Denmark may travel to conflict zones in the Middle East and Africa in order to receive militant training or take part in hostilities against e.g. an international military presence or local authorities. It is possible that some of these individuals may return to Denmark and apply their skills to continued terrorist-related activity.

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 02 June 2008, Danish diplomatic representations or other obvious Danish targets may be particularly exposed to the threat of terrorism.

A number of abduction cases in the past year have illustrated the fact that there is a considerable risk of abduction in a number of places around the world. The risk is particularly high in Afghanistan and Pakistan as well as in certain parts of the Middle East and North 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 gathered. Furthermore, attacks against public transportation and traffic hubs have a 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. There have also been examples of simple attacks against targets with an obvious symbolic or political value. CTA assesses that targets in Denmark with a symbolic value for terrorists may include public authorities, the Danish defence or individuals/companies linked to the Cartoon Case. In addition, it seems to be a crucial criterion seems to be that many people are gathered in one place, e.g. in shopping centres, hotels or public areas.

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 (often referred to as Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs)) in their attacks. However, recent developments suggest a shift towards an increased use of large bombs with considerable blast power and a growing risk of attacks against relatively well-protected locations. 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.

Terrorist groups are constantly seeking to draw lessons from previous 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.

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.