

## **Assessment of the terror threat against Denmark (VTD)**

2 June 2008

### **Summary**

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 today.

In addition, there is a considerable and acknowledged terror threat against Danish interests in certain parts of the world. This especially applies to regions where al-Qaida related groups are active; including particularly countries in North Africa and the Middle East as well as in Pakistan and Afghanistan. This is, for instance, underlined by the terrorist attack at the Danish embassy in Pakistan on 2 June 2008.

The reprinting of the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in February 2008 has led to a renewed negative focus on Denmark in a number of countries.

Currently, there is an increased focus on Denmark – also among leading militant extremists abroad. Among such extremists there is a wish to carry out acts of terrorism against Denmark, Danes and Danish interests abroad.

The current threat of terrorism specifically directed at Danes may have increased in certain areas abroad, especially in cases where individuals may easily be recognised as being Danish. However, Danes travelling abroad are not generally assessed as being more exposed to the threat of terrorism than people of other nationalities.

Terrorist attacks can take place without prior intelligence indications, i.e. without warning.

The terror threat in Denmark primarily comes from networks, groups and individuals who adhere to various forms of militant Islamist ideology, including al-Qaida related groups. Such networks may be based in Denmark or abroad.

In Denmark, there are persons and circles that sympathize with and/or support groups that are involved in terrorist activities. Furthermore, there are persons and circles in Denmark that are willing to get involved in terror-related activities.

Even though the terror threat has increased in recent years, it is important to note that the risk of becoming a random victim of a terrorist attack in Denmark or abroad is still very limited, except in certain conflict areas, e.g. parts of Iraq.

## **The threat against Denmark**

In recent years, Denmark and the rest of the Western world have experienced an increase in the terrorist threat, and CTA assesses that there is a general terror threat against Denmark today.

The reprinting of the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in February 2008 has led to a renewed negative attention on Denmark in a number of countries, including in the Middle East and North Africa.

The reprinting has led to an increased focus on Denmark – also among leading militant extremists abroad. Among such extremists there is a wish to carry out acts of terrorism against Denmark.

In March 2008, the al-Qaida leader, Usama Bin Ladin, condemned the reprinting of the cartoons. In March and April 2006 both Bin Ladin and the high-ranking al-Qaida leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, mentioned and condemned Denmark in the wake of the original publication of the cartoons.

It is CTA's general assessment that the cartoon case together with Denmark's participation in the military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq have contributed to an intensified focus on Denmark in militant extremist circles.

The terror threat against Denmark primarily comes from networks, groups and individuals who adhere to various forms of militant Islamist ideologies, including al-Qaida related groups. Such networks may be based in Denmark or abroad.

Complex and spectacular attacks require considerable resources and networks in relation to facilitation and planning. Therefore, such attacks will often be difficult to carry out.

Less complicated attacks with simpler means can be carried out with less preparation and resources. For this reason, such attacks demand special attention from the authorities.

Terrorist attacks can take place without prior intelligence indications, i.e. without warning. This is the experience from e.g. the attacks in Madrid in 2004 and in London in 2005.

In Denmark, there are persons and circles that sympathize with and/or support groups that are involved in terrorist activities. Moreover, there are circles and persons in Denmark who are willing to get involved in terror-related activities.

This fact is underlined e.g. by the disrupted terror plots in Odense, where three individuals in November 2007 were sentenced for attempted terror attacks, and in Copenhagen (arrests in September and November 2007). Even though the courts have not yet ruled in the latter case, there are strong indications that the individuals charged had both specific plans and the capacity to carry out a terrorist attack.

Other examples are the so-called Glostrup Case in which one of the individuals charged was sentenced to 7 years' imprisonment for attempt to commit terrorism, and the case from April 2007 in which a Danish-Moroccan individual was sentenced to 3 years' and six months' imprisonment for e.g. general guidance of terror groups and propagation of material aimed at recruiting members for such groups.

Even though the terror threat has increased in recent years, it is important to note that the risk of becoming a random victim of a terrorist attack in Denmark or abroad is still very limited, except in a few conflict areas, e.g. parts of Iraq.

### **The threat against Danes and Danish interests abroad**

Recently, the reprinting of the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed has led to an increased focus on Denmark – also from leading militant extremists abroad – and there is a wish among such extremists to carry out acts of terrorism against Danes and Danish interests abroad.

As illustrated by the attack at the Danish embassy in Pakistan on 2 June 2008, obvious Danish targets, such as Danish diplomatic representations, may be particularly exposed to the threat of terrorism, and currently there is a considerable and acknowledged threat to Danish interests in certain parts of the world. This especially applies to regions where al-Qaida related groups are active, including

particularly countries in North Africa and the Middle East as well as in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

It is possible that extremists in other places will become inspired by the attack in Pakistan and will attempt to attack Danish interests.

In the current situation, the threat of terrorism specifically directed at Danes may have increased in certain areas abroad, especially in cases where individuals may easily be recognised as being Danish. However, Danes travelling abroad are not generally assessed as being more exposed to the threat of terrorism than people of other nationalities. The primary risk of Danes becoming victims of terrorist acts abroad stems from the fact that Danes typically stay in the same places as other Westerners. These places may be potential terrorist targets.

### **Radicalisation in Denmark**

There is no clear-cut profile of persons who become radicalised and subsequently are recruited for terrorism.

However, experience from recent years in Denmark and other European countries shows that a significant and increasing part of the militant extremists are young or very young men born and raised in the West.

Often, these "home-grown" extremists have undergone a quick radicalisation process in which the internet, established extremist ideologists and charismatic persons in combination with friends and personal networks have played an important role. These individuals are not necessarily connected to a specific conflict area, but rather consider themselves part of a world-wide Muslim community which, in their view, is being attacked.

### **Potential targets**

The increased counterterrorism efforts in recent years have made it more difficult to hit high-profile protected targets. At the same time, attacks carried out at unprotected locations against crowds of people in order to cause as heavy losses as possible, remain one of the preferred means for terrorists. There are also examples of small, simple attacks against soft targets with a clear symbolic or political aim as was the

case with the killing of Theo Van Gogh in the Netherlands in 2004 and the assassination plans against one of the Danish individuals behind the cartoons of the prophet Mohammad.

Experience from abroad shows that terrorists often prefer to carry out attacks against public transportation. This is due, not least, to the fact that this is an easily accessible target where typically a lot of people are gathered. Furthermore, attacks against public transport and traffic hubs have a psychological effect on the public since these are locations where large segments of the population come regularly and therefore could see themselves as potential victims.

In the Western world, there are relatively few examples of terrorists who consider critical national infrastructure such as the transport sector as a target in itself. Often, it seems crucial that many people are gathered in one place and, therefore, it is presumed that, in principle, an attack might just as well be aimed at other targets where many people gather, e.g. shopping centres, bars, public squares and sports events.

## **Methods**

Typically, terrorists use improvised explosive devices (IED) in their attacks.

The type of terrorist attacks that took place in Madrid in 2004 and in London in 2005 - IEDs aimed at public transportation - will likely remain a central terrorist method. At the same time, it is clear that terrorist groups constantly seek to develop new and surprising and, thus, hardly predictable types of attacks. The plans in the UK in January 2007 to kidnap and kill a Muslim British soldier is one example. This attack was inspired by similar kidnappings in Iraq and the media attention they caused, but with the new element that this particular kidnapping was meant to take place in the Western world.