

Assessment of the Terror Threat against Denmark

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Summary

It is the assessment of the Center for Terror Analysis (CTA) that the terror threat against Denmark remains significant.

The global threat picture is dynamic, fragmented and complex. The terror threat against Denmark primarily emanates from groups, networks and individuals who adhere to a militant Islamist ideology. The threat is mainly directed towards targets with affiliation to the Cartoon Case. CTA assesses that in the future militant Islamists will also identify other targets, including targets of symbolic value or easily accessible and unprotected targets.

An increasing number of individuals from the West, including Denmark, seek out regions affected by violent conflict. Stays in such regions may lead to contact with militant Islamists and, thus, a risk of being radicalised. CTA assesses that there is an added risk of terror-related activities when such individuals return home.

CTA assesses that small groups and individuals associated with political left- or right-wing extremist circles in Denmark pose a certain terror threat. The terrorist attacks in Norway on 22 July 2011 and other events abroad may have an inspirational effect on individuals and groups in Denmark. In left-wing extremist circles there are individuals who have the will and capacity to commit serious, violent crimes, including arson and attacks on political opponents.

CTA assesses that a terrorist attack in Denmark could be executed using easily accessible weapons such as stabbing weapons, small arms, incendiary bombs or home made bombs. A terrorist attack can take place without prior intelligence-based indications.

CTA assesses that the continued militant Islamists focus on Denmark may make Danes and Danish interests the target of terrorist attack and kidnapping in certain parts of the world. The primary terror threat to Danes abroad emerges when they are in places that may be local terrorist targets.

The risk of falling victim to a terrorist attack in Denmark or abroad remains very limited, except in certain foreign conflict zones.

Developments in the global threat picture

The terror threat to Denmark is transnational in nature. Thus, the threat to Denmark is closely linked to developments in the global threat picture. Threats to Denmark often have direct links to foreign countries, for instance when attack planning takes place via contact to international terrorist networks, following trips abroad, or when perpetrators enter Denmark from another country.

International counter-terrorist efforts have weakened the al-Qaida network in Pakistan/Afghanistan. However, the al-Qaida Senior Leadership remains active in terms of planning and trying to execute terrorist attacks against the West. At the same time, there are other terrorist groups, especially in Pakistan, with the capacity to strike against Western targets, also outside the region.

The political changes in the Middle East and North Africa have altered conditions for terrorist groups in the region. In a number of cases, the upheaval has weakened local security institutions. This has increased the latitude for terrorist groups, and new safe havens have emerged for terrorist groups to train and plan their attacks.

In this increasingly fragmented threat picture, regional terrorist groups in the Middle East and North Africa have gained in relative importance. While regional groups are generally focused on local issues and targets, many of them share the al-Qaida vision of Islamic rule and look upon the West as an obstacle hereto. Attacks against Western targets in the region or in Western countries will therefore remain an element of the planning efforts within such groups. The potential terrorist targets and the *modi operandi* of the groups vary, depending for instance on local interests. Thus, the threat picture has become increasingly dynamic. The terrorist groups continuously develop new attack methods, while actively and persistently trying to test and bypass security measures. Comprehensive, complex attacks are still being planned, but calls are increasingly being made for attacks using simple means, requiring less planning, or for solo terrorism where an individual acts alone.

The upheaval in the Middle East and North Africa has also led to new conflicts. The rebellion in Syria has been particularly attractive to individuals resident in the West, including Denmark. This has increased the risk of these individuals coming into contact with militant Islamist networks, including al-Qaida-affiliated networks. Other conflict zones, including Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan and Afghanistan, continue to attract individuals resident in the West.

Other terrorist groups or organisations that use terrorism as a means may also have an interest in striking against targets or interests in Denmark as part of a local or regional conflict or in response to political disagreement with the West. In the past year, there have been examples of such groups seeking to strike against Israeli and Jewish targets around the world, including Europe.

In political extremist circles – both left- and right-wing – the will to use violence continues to rise. The financial crisis in Southern Europe, especially in Greece, has led to violent clashes and attacks on foreigners perpetrated by individuals with a background in right-wing extremist circles. In Germany, right-wing extremists have carried out targeted attacks against Muslims. At the same time, right- as well as left-wing extremist circles increasingly direct their violent activities against state institutions. There are signs that the terrorist attack in Norway on 22 July 2011 has inspired like-minded individuals in other European countries.

While the global terror threat as such has not increased, the current overall threat picture against the West and Denmark appears more fragmented, dynamic and complex. The terror threat has thus become increasingly unpredictable.

The terror threat against Denmark

CTA assesses that the terror threat to Denmark remains significant.

As a Western country with an active foreign and security policy, Denmark is a target of international terrorist groups in the same way as other Western countries. However, as a result of the Cartoon Case, Denmark continues to be of particular interest to militant Islamist terrorist networks.

The reprinting of the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in February 2008 caused militant Islamists in Denmark and abroad to label Denmark a high-priority terrorist target. On a number of occasions since 2008, militant Islamists in Denmark or abroad have planned or attempted to carry out attacks in Denmark or against Danish interests abroad. The preparation of a terrorist attack against the Danish newspaper domicile JP/Politikens Hus in Copenhagen in December 2010 serves as an example of this.

New international cases, which have been perceived as insults to Islam, have not weakened the interest in Denmark. This is due to a common perception among militant Islamist networks that Denmark, with the Cartoon Case, is responsible for starting these cases and that Denmark has not yet been punished sufficiently. The

threat continues to be mainly directed against individuals and locations with affiliation to the Cartoon Case.

It seems likely, however, that militant Islamists who act independently or with contact to international networks will increasingly take the initiative to identify other terrorist targets. This might include targets deemed to be of symbolic value, including public or military institutions. It might also be easily accessible and unprotected targets. Experience from other Western countries shows that attacks against public transport systems or crowded places have a significant psychological effect on the public.

In recent years, the trend has been for militant Islamist groups to call for the planning and execution of solo terrorism against such easily accessible and unprotected targets. Such incitement from militant Islamist groups may also inspire individuals with no particular affiliation to Denmark to travel to Denmark to commit an act of terrorism.

There have been examples in Denmark of planning or execution of terrorist acts that have involved individuals who have been to conflict zones or who have engaged in combat, acquired military skills or established links with militant Islamist networks. The number of individuals from Denmark who choose to travel to conflict zones, including Syria, is growing. Going to a conflict zone does not necessarily mean that an individual is bound to commit terrorism. However, it increases the risk of contact with militant Islamist networks, which – along with other influences of a conflict zone – could make a person more susceptible to radicalisation and motivated to carry out terror-related activities upon his or her return. It might be in relation to an existing militant Islamist network or as a solo terrorist attack with the individual acting alone.

There have been a few examples where Danes going to conflict zones have been affiliated with criminal circles in Denmark, including gang-related circles. Thus, there is a risk that militant Islamists in Denmark may gain access to weapons, ammunition and other related items from such criminal circles.

In Denmark, there is also a risk that individuals may choose to commit terrorism as a result of perceived injustice or other influences, including stories in the media or on the internet, even without having had any direct contact with terrorist groups. However, the influence asserted by personal contacts and social relations as well as specific experience, e.g. from a training camp or conflict zone, remain key factors for understanding why someone decides to commit terrorism.

Small groups and individuals associated with political extremist circles in Denmark pose a certain terror threat. In the propaganda used by left- and right-wing extremists in Denmark, the image of the enemy appears to comprise perceived political opponents or certain minority groups. However, as seen abroad, violent activities of both wings may also be directed against state institutions, including the police, foreign embassies or private organisations or companies thought to be of symbolic value, e.g. from an anti-capitalist or xenophobic perspective.

CTA assesses that there may be individuals or groups in Denmark create their own militant ideology on the basis of various right-wing extremist ideas. The terrorist attacks in Norway on 22 July 2011 and other events abroad may have an inspiring effect on individuals and groups in Denmark. There are individuals in Danish left-wing extremist circles with the will and capacity to commit serious, violent crimes, including arson and attacks on political opponents.

Attempted terrorist attacks can take place without prior intelligence-based indications, i.e. without warning. The possibility of carrying out a terrorist attack depends on the security measures in place to protect potential targets and on the capacity of the terrorists.

When it comes to the capacity to carry out a terrorist attack in Denmark, it is the assessment of CTA that

- the capacity exists to carry out terrorist attacks using easily accessible weapons, including stabbing weapons, small arms, incendiary bombs or small, home-made bombs that can be manufactured using commercially available products;
- the capacity to use simple chemical substances for terrorist purposes can be acquired;
- the capacity to carry out complex terrorist attacks in Denmark, which require lengthy planning, large material expenses and multiple perpetrators, is limited;
- terrorist groups do not currently hold the capacity to carry out targeted and disruptive cyber-terrorist attacks against IT or telecommunications infrastructure to adversely affect Danish society;
- terrorist groups do not hold the capacity to carry out terrorist attacks using biological, radiological or nuclear material.

The terror threat against Danes and Danish interests abroad

As a result of the continued militant Islamists focus on Denmark, there is a risk that Danes and Danish interests might become targets of terrorist attacks or kidnapping in certain parts of the world, especially when individuals or interests are immediately identifiable as Danish. Furthermore, there is general risk of terrorism and kidnapping in countries where militant Islamist groups who focus on Westerners and Western interests are active. This is especially true for Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen and, to a certain extent, countries bordering these countries, including Kenya. Stay posted on country-specific risks via the online travel guide of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark (www.um.dk).

As illustrated by the al-Qaida attack on the Danish Embassy in Pakistan on 2 June 2008, Danish diplomatic representations or other clearly identifiable Danish interests may be particularly exposed to the threat of terrorism. Although security has been increased significantly at many premises, Danish diplomatic representations may also become targets of terrorism in the future as terrorists may perceive them as less secure and, thereby, more accessible targets than the diplomatic representations of other larger Western countries.

There is still an intention among terrorists to attack international airline traffic.

It remains, however, that as a Dane, the primary risk of falling victim to terrorism is related to places that may be local terrorist targets, including places where many Westerners congregate, crowded places or large demonstrations.

The risk of falling victim to a terrorist attack in Denmark or abroad remains very limited, except in certain foreign conflict zones.