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Assessment of the terror threat to Denmark

Summary

The terror threat to Denmark remains significant. This means that there are individuals with intent and capacity to commit terrorist attacks in Denmark. Terrorist attacks can take place without prior intelligence-based indications. However, the risk of falling victim to a terrorist attack in Denmark remains limited.

The terror threat is primarily posed by militant Islamism. The key factors affecting the threat picture are the conflict in Syria and Iraq and the group that refers to itself as the Islamic State (IS). IS propaganda has an influential effect on persons in Denmark to commit terrorism or to travel to Syria/Iraq to join IS. Moreover, IS can direct attacks against Denmark.

CTA assesses that simple attacks committed by small groups or by individuals who have not travelled to Syria/Iraq constitute the most probable kind of terror attacks in Denmark. Capacity built through e.g. criminal circles may increase the effect of an attack. The complexity of the threat picture has at the same time been increased by IS' capability to commit relatively complex terrorist attacks in the West. CTA assesses that attacks involving several attackers and targets, including civilians, can also occur in Denmark. CTA assesses that the presence of individuals from Denmark with IS in Syria/Iraq may contribute to attack planning against Denmark.

The number of individuals in Denmark who travel to Syria/Iraq is decreasing. Most of the travellers join IS. CTA assesses that this may increase their level of radicalisation and proneness to violence and, consequently, the threat posed by them if they return.

Through the use of forged or stolen documents, militant Islamist groups may send persons to Europe by using ordinary travel routes, or routes that are being used by refugees and migrants. CTA assesses that attacks committed in one country have often been planned in one or more other countries.

CTA assesses that increasing focus on refugees and migrants among persons affiliated with political extremist circles or extremist sympathisers may increase the threat to asylum centres, refugees and migrants as well as related authorities.

Developments in the global threat picture

The global threat picture is still very much affected by militant Islamist groups abroad.¹ The key factors in the threat picture are the conflict in Syria and Iraq and the group that refers to itself as the Islamic State (IS).² Allegiance has been pledged to IS by militant Islamist groups in several countries in the Middle East, Asia, Africa and the Caucasus. Many of those groups used to be affiliated with al-Qaida (AQ). IS has included several of them as so-called 'provinces' in the caliphate which they announced in June 2014 for the areas in Syria and Iraq controlled by them.

For a number of years, the conflict in Syria/Iraq has attracted a large number of people, particularly from the Middle East and North Africa, but also from Europe. The conflict zone has provided a safe haven for experienced militant Islamists from other parts of the world, e.g. for planning attacks against the West. However, the efforts made by the international coalition has put pressure on IS, which has lost ground in both Syria and in Iraq.

In propaganda spread globally through social media, IS and other militant Islamists encourage individuals to attack targets in countries which are parties to the international coalition. Since autumn 2014, there has been a dramatic rise in the number of attacks against the West, the vast majority of which is simple attacks committed by individuals.

CTA assesses that IS, as a response to the pressure, among other factors, has increased focus on committing relatively complex terrorist attacks in the West, with multiple targets and many civilian casualties. CTA assesses that the terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015 and Brussels on 22 March 2016 show that IS now has such a capacity.

CTA assesses that IS will increasingly seek to hit targets in countries that form part of the coalition against them. CTA assesses that IS sympathisers in Europe may be used when facilitating, planning and committing terrorist attacks.

¹ For an in-depth review of the elements of the global threat picture affecting the foreign-based terror threat, see the 2015 Intelligence Risk Assessment of the Danish Defence Intelligence Service (DDIS) on <http://fe-ddis.dk>.

² The group is also referred to as ISIL (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) and ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), and the Arabic abbreviation *Da'esh* is also being used.

CTA assesses that attacks committed in one country have often been planned and prepared in one or more other countries. The exposure of such border-crossing attack planning poses special challenges.

The conflict in Syria/Iraq is affecting security in neighbouring countries. At the same time, militant Islamist groups have gained more leeway in countries like Afghanistan, Libya and Yemen. In addition, groups affiliated with IS and AQ are active in the northern, western and eastern parts of Africa. In several countries in Asia, including Indonesia and Bangladesh, there is an increasing influence of militant extremist groups affiliated with IS or AQ.

IS continues to challenge the position that AQ has traditionally held among militant Islamist groups around the world. AQ's network includes, among others, the Nusra Front in Syria, AQAP in Yemen and AQIM in the Maghreb/Sahel. The continued international counter-terrorism efforts have reduced the AQ network's capacity – but not its intention – to commit attacks in the West. CTA assesses that competition from IS may lead to AQ intensifying its efforts to commit terrorist attacks against Western targets. During the recent months, groups affiliated with AQ has taken responsibility for several attacks against Western targets in, among others, western parts of Africa.

CTA assesses that IS and other militant extremist groups can use the flow of refugees and migrants to send persons to Europe with a view to committing terrorism. CTA assesses that these groups have the capacity to produce forged travel documents and have access to stolen documents, which enable the use of ordinary and safer travel routes. In addition, CTA assesses that there may be individuals among refugees and migrants arriving in Europe who sympathise with or may be influenced by militant Islamism but who are not linked to militant Islamist groups.

Both right- and left-wing extremist circles in Europe show a continued will to use violence. Attacks have been made on political opponents, state institutions and minorities. Extremist right-wing circles focus on criticism of Islam and on refugees and migrants. Denmark's neighbouring countries have seen a significant increase in the number of threats as well as violent and arson attacks on asylum centres.

The terror threat to Denmark

CTA assesses that the terror threat to Denmark remains significant. This means that there are individuals who have the intention and capacity to commit terrorist attacks

in Denmark. Terrorist attacks can take place without prior intelligence-based indications.

Although the threat level remains unchanged, the elements that comprise the threat picture continue to change. This causes authorities to adjust their security and response measures as well as other counter-terrorism measures on an ongoing basis. Therefore, the risk of falling victim to a terrorist attack in Denmark remains limited.

CTA assesses that the terror threat to Denmark is mainly posed by individuals sympathising with militant Islamism. They are motivated by a belief that Islam is under attack by the West, by Denmark's active foreign and security policy, and by the cartoon case.

CTA assesses that IS has become the most important factor in the threat picture for Denmark. The threat to Denmark is posed by:

- Individuals in Denmark who are influenced by militant Islamism to carry out attacks on their own
- Individuals from Denmark who return from Syria/Iraq and who
 - carry out attacks on their own, or
 - have as their mission to carry out an attack that may have been planned abroad
- Other individuals who travel to Denmark to commit terrorism

These threats may be augmented by the presence of individuals from Denmark with IS in Syria/Iraq. Such persons may influence other people to commit terrorism, or they may contribute to the planning of attacks against targets in Denmark.

Individuals and circles in Denmark

CTA assesses that the propaganda of IS and other militant Islamist groups contributes to the radicalisation of individuals and circles in Denmark. CTA assesses that the propaganda may have a radicalising effect on socially marginalised and other vulnerable young people in particular. Further, virtual communities on social media and group communities like those existing in criminal circles, prisons and Islamist circles may be conducive to the radicalisation process.

CTA assesses that support for IS from individuals within Islamist circles in Denmark is growing in comparison with the support for other militant Islamist groups. CTA

assesses that, in these circles, efforts are made to spread propaganda and to recruit, radicalise and facilitate people and resources for conflict zones. CTA assesses that there are persons who join the circles, but also persons who leave them. Several prominent members have left for Syria/Iraq. CTA assesses that a terror threat emanates from individuals who move within these circles.

CTA assesses that, in certain cases, persons who are prevented from travelling to Syria/Iraq by their families or the authorities may become frustrated, and as a result may plan to commit terrorism.

Persons with no experience from the conflict zone who are influenced by the propaganda or guidance provided by Islamist individuals or groups typically tend to carry out simple attacks using easily accessible means following a short planning phase. The attacks are often carried out by individuals on their own or by a small group. They may have a stronger effect if the attackers have gained capacity through e.g. a criminal circle. The attacks on the cultural centre *Krudttønden* and the synagogue in Copenhagen on 14 and 15 February 2015, respectively, are examples of this type of attacks.

CTA assesses that relatively simple attacks committed by individuals or small groups remain the most probable kind of terror attacks in Denmark.

Returnees from and travellers to Syria/Iraq

Militant Islamist propaganda continues to influence individuals in Denmark to travel to the conflict zone in Syria/Iraq. However, CTA assesses that fewer persons leave Denmark than earlier. Most travellers join militant Islamist groups, primarily IS.

CTA assesses that a minimum of 135 persons have left Denmark for Syria/Iraq since the summer of 2012. This number may be higher. Most of the travellers are young Sunni males. CTA assesses that up to 10% of the travellers are female. The relative percentage of females has risen since the summer of 2014 as compared to prior years. CTA assesses that just below half of the travellers are currently in Denmark. Nearly 25% remain in the conflict zone and an equivalent part are assumed to have been killed.

CTA assesses that staying in a conflict zone with militant Islamists may result in radicalisation, brutalisation and proneness to violence. Through combat experience and training, travellers may strengthen their ability to commit terrorism. They may

also become very security-conscious, which makes it more difficult for the authorities to uncover their activities. CTA assesses that the fact that most of the travellers now join IS may increase the threat posed by such persons if they return.

Persons who travel from the conflict zone to Denmark may be motivated to carry out an attack on their own. They may also be involved in a more complex attack carried out by multiple attackers. Such an attack may also involve persons who have been sent to Denmark by militant Islamist groups to commit terrorism.

CTA assesses that the attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015 and in Brussels on 22 March 2016 are examples of this kind of attack, and that such attacks could also occur in Denmark.

Targets and capacity

CTA assesses that militant Islamist propaganda may encourage persons in Denmark to carry out attacks on symbolic targets such as security authorities and other authorities or officials, on persons, institutions and events that may be considered to insult Islam, and on Jewish targets and unprotected civilian targets. CTA assesses that persons in Denmark may be inspired by terrorist attacks committed in other Western countries to carry out similar attacks in Denmark.

CTA assesses that IS intends to hit targets in countries which form part of the international coalition and that this may increase the threat to unprotected civilian targets in Denmark.

CTA assesses that capacity to carry out terrorist attacks using easily accessible weapons, such as stabbing weapons, small arms, incendiary bombs and small IEDS, or through the use of other readily available means, exists in Denmark. Such simple attacks may be carried out after a short period of planning, or without any planning at all.

CTA assesses that the presence of returnees from Syria and Iraq with military skills and combat experience and of individuals with similar capacity from e.g. criminal circles increases the threat of simple attacks with higher effect and of serial attacks, in which a person or group carries out consecutive attacks. Contact to criminal circles may facilitate access to weapons and explosives.

CTA assesses that IS' establishment of a capacity to plan and carry out relatively complex terrorist attacks in the West means that attacks committed by multiple attackers and against multiple targets may also occur in Denmark. CTA assesses that strongly radicalized and coarsened individuals can be conducive to an increased brutality of attacks, including the risk of suicide attacks.

CTA assesses that, in Denmark, there is a limited capacity to carry out terrorist attacks using chemical agents and a very limited capacity to carry out terrorist attacks using biological or radioactive agents. CTA assesses that there is no capacity to carry out terrorist attacks in Denmark using nuclear material. CTA assesses that there is no capacity to carry out targeted and destructive cyber-attacks against IT and telecommunications infrastructure at a level which could affect Danish society, but that militant Islamist groups seek to acquire damaging cyber-capacity.

Other threats

CTA assesses that the ethnic/sectarian dimensions of the conflict in Syria and Iraq may lead to confrontations between the affected groups in Denmark. CTA assesses that the threat of terror posed by such confrontations is limited.

There are political extremist circles in Denmark that are prepared to use violence to promote their political agenda. The violence may be directed at political opponents, minority groups, including refugees and migrants, and organisations and companies considered to have a symbolic value. CTA assesses that there is a limited terror threat from individuals or groups that move within or sympathise with such circles.

CTA assesses that increasing focus on refugees and migrants among persons affiliated with political extremist circles or extremist sympathisers may increase the threat to asylum centres, refugees and migrants as well as relevant authorities. CTA assesses that such a threat may be in nature of violence, arson, or other types of attacks. Attacks or threats against refugees and migrants by right-wing extremists may lead to reactions from Islamists or left-wing extremists.

The terror threat to Danes and Danish interests abroad

CTA assesses that there is a terror threat to Danish interests abroad. This applies in particular to countries in which militant Islamists consider Western interests to be attractive terrorist targets, with one or more of the following circumstances prevailing:

- There is a presence of militant Islamists with a capacity

- There is a presence of returnees with a capacity acquired from the conflict in Syria and Iraq
- There is a presence of individuals or groups with a declared loyalty towards IS or AQ
- There is a presence of militant Islamists focusing on Denmark

CTA assesses that individuals or groups that have declared their loyalty to IS or AQ may become more focused on hitting Western targets, including Danish targets, in their local geographical area. CTA assesses that this threat may be directed at tourists from the West. Attacks in 2015 and 2016 on hotels and other tourist venues illustrate that tourists and locations at which Westerners are gathered are becoming increasingly interesting to militant Islamists.

CTA assesses that the threat of kidnapping associated with the threat of terrorism is predominant in areas where militant Islamist groups are active, including in conflict zones and neighbouring regions. CTA assesses that the very brutal conduct of IS in particular has increased the threat of being killed in the context of a kidnapping. CTA assesses that the selection by militant Islamists of people to be kidnapped is often random and opportunist rather than based on a wish to kidnap certain nationalities.

Danish diplomatic representations and other Danish presence abroad may be perceived as symbolic targets, enabling strikes against Denmark without making an attack in Denmark. Danish representations may also become the targets of terrorist attacks because militant Islamists may perceive them as less secure than e.g. the representations of larger Western countries.

The risk of Danes and Danish interests falling victim to a terrorist attack increases if they are directly identifiable as Danish. Moreover, Danes may also be hit randomly by terrorist attacks abroad when visiting places that may represent local terrorist targets, e.g. when in large crowds or near public buildings.

CTA assesses that attacks on Danish targets abroad may be carried out through the use of simple and easily accessible means, but that large or complex attacks, including bomb attacks, may also occur, particularly in countries where militant Islamist groups already have the capacity for such attacks.

CTA assesses that militant Islamist groups still consider international air traffic a particularly attractive target and continuously seek to hit it. CTA assesses that militant

Islamist groups will be particularly focused on countries where airport security control is considered to be low.

Information on country-specific risks is provided via the travel advice of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs on www.um.dk.