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Assessment of the terror threat to Denmark

Summary

CTA assesses that the terror threat to Denmark remains significant. The group calling itself Islamic State (IS) continues to be the most important factor in the threat picture. The military efforts against IS in Syria and Iraq have reduced the combat capability of the group as well as its territorial control. This has had the effect that IS has given more priority to hitting western targets through planned, more complex attacks such as the ones in Paris and Brussels.

Militant Islamists are still seeking to support and give inspiration to more simple terrorist attacks in the West. CTA assesses that simple attacks with readily available means and short planning is the most likely form of terrorist attack in Denmark. Militant Islamist propaganda urging individuals to act increases the terror threat against unprotected civilian targets, e.g. crowded locations and transport infrastructure.

The support for IS has become less visible within Islamist circles in Denmark, but dissemination of propaganda, recruitment and radicalisation as well as the facilitation of people and resources to conflict zones continues to take place. It is the assessment of CTA that a terror threat still emanates from militant individuals within these circles that may feature as operators or support network in connection with attack planning against Denmark. Women play a growing role within Islamist circles in Denmark and within militant Islamism. In the West, women have been involved in several terrorist attacks within the last year.

Only very few people now leave Denmark for the conflict zone in Syria/Iraq. The pressure on IS may make more foreign fighters return home. Many of these have been in Syria/Iraq for a long time and may be particularly radicalised and prone to violence, constituting an increased terror threat against Denmark. Women and minors may also pose a threat. The fact that more foreign fighters may leave the conflict zone can also increase the threat against Danish interests abroad.

CTA assesses that the terror threat posed by political extremist circles in Denmark is limited. CTA assesses that there is an increased focus on the refugee situation among individuals with extreme right-wing sympathies and that a threat emanates from them that may be directed towards e.g. asylum centres, refugees, religious minorities and related authorities.

Developments in the global threat picture

The global threat picture is still very much affected by foreign militant Islamist groups. The key factors in the current threat picture are the conflict in Syria and Iraq and the group calling itself Islamic State (IS).

The military effort against IS in Syria and Iraq has reduced the combat capability of the group as well as its control of the areas over which it has proclaimed a caliphate. At the same time, both the quantity and the quality of the IS propaganda production has dropped within the last year. Under these circumstances, IS has given more priority to attacking western targets. These attacks take place through IS planning attacks themselves or IS influencing sympathisers to do so. At the same time, IS' media apparatus is seeking to give an inflated impression of the group's capability by claiming responsibility for attacks in which the group's involvement is doubtful.

Within the last few years, there has been an increase in the number of planned and successful attacks in the West from an average of one per month from 2011 to 2014 to four in 2015 and approximately five in 2016. In several cases, the perpetrator was known to the security authorities ahead of the attack. At the same time, more women are involved in attack planning in Europe.

Fewer foreign fighters now travel to Syria/Iraq, and many have been killed within the last year. A consequence of IS losing territory can be that a growing number of foreign fighters will leave the area. This may increase the terror threat in countries neighbouring the conflict as well as in the countries to which the foreign fighters travel.

CTA assesses that IS will be increasingly focused on the global fight and that the caliphate will take on a virtual nature. IS is therefore increasingly going to direct its propaganda on calls for attacks outside the conflict zone, particularly in countries participating in the international coalition against IS. The propaganda may also call for attacks against other local opponents, first and foremost minorities such as the Shiites.

A number of militant Islamist groups in e.g. the Middle East, Asia and Africa have declared their loyalty to IS. CTA assesses that these groups in the short term, do not possess capability to do propaganda and attack planning that can compensate for the loss of capability suffered by IS in Syria/Iraq.

Al-Qaida (AQ) continues to be intent on attacking targets in the West. Its ability is, however, limited. In recent years, AQ has attacked western targets outside the West, e.g. in Africa and Asia, through groups that are part of the AQ network. CTA assesses that AQ could take advantage of a situation in which IS is impaired to e.g. attract foreign fighters and take over networks. At the same time, AQ may increase its focus on committing attacks against targets in the West. This threat may also emanate from AQ-affiliated groups in e.g. Syria.

CTA assesses that the influx of refugees and migrants to Europe from existing and new conflict zones will continue. CTA assesses that IS and other militant Islamist groups may continue trying to exploit the flow of refugees and migrants to send individuals to Europe to commit acts of terrorism. The increased focus on this threat and the implemented restrictions on the access to Europe have, however, made this more difficult. CTA assesses that militant Islamist groups will continue to be able to use ordinary travel routes, for example via third countries, by using stolen or forged travel documents.

Militant Islamists are increasingly utilising the wider availability of encryption technology in order to hide their communication from the authorities. This may include the dissemination of propaganda and attack planning. Furthermore, militant Islamists are attempting to improve their capability to carry out attacks, including using methods that have already been tested in a conflict zone. These may include home-made explosives, for example in vehicles, chemical toxins and the use of drones.

Within both right- and left-wing extremist circles in Europe, there is a will to use violence. Right-wing extremist circles are focusing on criticism of Islam, refugees and migrants and on crimes committed by foreigners. The countries around Denmark have experienced a significant increase in the number of threats, violent episodes and arson attacks aimed at refugees ascribed to individuals who are sympathetic towards right-wing extremist views. CTA assesses that this increases the threat from political extremist groups, primarily right-wing extremists.

The terror threat to Denmark

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

CTA assesses that the terror threat to Denmark mainly emanates from individuals sympathising with militant Islamism. They are motivated by a belief that Islam is under attack from the West, by Denmark's active foreign and security policy, including the Danish participation in the international coalition against IS, and by the cartoon case.

CTA assesses that IS remains the most important element in the threat to Denmark. CTA assesses that various national measures and the international pressure against IS have contributed to a decline in the number of individuals from Denmark who travel to the conflict zone in Syria/Iraq, and that support for IS is less visible among individuals within Danish Islamist circles who sympathise with militant Islamism.

At the same time, with the attacks in Paris in November 2015 and in Brussels in March 2016, IS has demonstrated capability to carry out more complex attacks planned or directed centrally by IS. CTA assesses that IS has the intention and capability to carry out more attacks of this type against western countries and that this threat also concerns Denmark.

In a number of executed and prevented attacks in the West within the last year, individuals affiliated with IS have supported the perpetrator, e.g. through advice and instructions on targets and methods. CTA assesses that such support may increase the effect of a simple attack and the subsequent propaganda.

The threat against Denmark in terms of both directed and supported attacks may become aggravated by the presence of individuals from Denmark with IS in Syria/Iraq who possess local knowledge and information on potential targets in Denmark.

CTA assesses that IS and other militant Islamist groups will continue to use propaganda as a means to urge and inspire individuals to carry out terror attacks on their own.

CTA assesses that IS will be able to maintain a capability to direct attacks against the West but that the international pressure on IS will reduce this capability over time. IS and other militant Islamists will continue to be able to support and inspire terrorist attacks against the West, also in the long term.

Individuals and circles in Denmark

CTA assesses that the propaganda from IS and other militant Islamist groups continues to contribute to the radicalisation of individuals and circles in Denmark. This is

particularly the case with marginalised and other vulnerable young people. Furthermore, virtual communities on social media and group communities like those existing among criminals, in prisons and in Islamist circles may promote radicalisation. With regards to criminal gangs, individuals with a looser affiliation - so-called peripheral individuals - may be particularly vulnerable to radicalisation.

CTA assesses that spreading of propaganda as well as recruitment, radicalisation and facilitation of people and resources to the conflict zone takes place in Danish Islamist circles. These circles appear less visible and more loosely organised than before. CTA still assesses that a terror threat emanates from individuals within these circles. These individuals may be in contact with militant Islamists abroad who have the capability and intention to commit acts of terrorism and could be used as operatives or support network in attack planning against Denmark.

CTA assesses that more women play an active and independent role within Islamist circles in Denmark. Women affiliated with militant Islamism may have a radicalising effect on others, including their own children. CTA assesses that female militant Islamists in the West see fewer obstacles to playing an operative role in a terrorist attack. CTA assesses that successful or prevented attacks carried out by women in other western countries may inspire female militant Islamists in Denmark.

CTA furthermore assesses that there may be individuals among refugees and migrants who have arrived in Europe and Denmark who can pose a terror threat either because of a direct link to militant Islamist groups abroad or because they have become radicalised. Such a threat to Denmark may also emanate from refugees and migrants in other countries than Denmark.

Travellers to and returnees from Syria/Iraq

CTA assesses that a minimum of 145 persons have left Denmark for Syria/Iraq since the summer of 2012. This number may be higher. CTA assesses that just below half of those who have left are now back in Denmark. Nearly one quarter remains in the conflict zone and one quarter is assumed killed.

CTA assesses that only very few persons have left within the last year and that the vast majority of these are younger women. Women now constitute approximately one third of the individuals from Denmark who are located in the conflict zone and nearly one in every eight of those who have travelled from Denmark to the conflict zone in total. The rest are mainly younger men.

The number of individuals who return to Denmark from Syria/Iraq has been declining since mid-2014. The vast majority of the male individuals who are located in the conflict zone, have been there for more than a year. CTA assesses that the military pressure on IS entails an increased risk that those who have gone to join the conflict will be killed, wounded or taken as prisoners. This development may have the consequence that more individuals will leave the conflict zone either to return to Denmark or to go to other countries.

CTA assesses that individuals who have been staying with militant Islamist groups like IS may be radicalised, brutalised and prone to violence when they return home. This influence may be greater if their stay has been lengthy. Having gained combat experience and undergone training, such individuals may have increased their capability to commit acts of terrorism and may have developed a high degree of security awareness. CTA assesses that such individuals may lead to an increased terror threat against Denmark or Danish interests abroad. This threat emanates from both men and women.

CTA assesses that returned foreign fighters may contribute to the radicalisation of groups and individuals in Denmark, including other prisoners while serving a sentence.

CTA assesses that returned Danish foreign fighters may have established links to other foreign fighters abroad and become part of transnational networks capable of contributing to the preparation and execution of terrorist attacks. Attacks that are prepared in one country but executed in another may be more difficult to uncover and prevent.

CTA assesses that the threat from returnees may become apparent within a very short time frame, but it can also remain dormant and not appear until later, e.g. following a triggering event. This may also become an issue in relation to minors who together with their parents have stayed with militant Islamists in the conflict zone..

Targets and capability

CTA assesses that militant Islamists will continue to attempt to attack symbolic targets such as security authorities and other authorities, individuals, institutions and events that may be perceived as offensive to Islam, as well as Jewish targets. At the same time, calls from militant Islamist propaganda increases the threat against unprotected civilian targets, e.g. crowded locations and transport infrastructure.

CTA assesses that individuals in Denmark can be inspired by terrorist attacks committed in other Western countries to carry out similar attacks in Denmark. The increasing number of attacks and attempted attacks in Europe may in itself contribute to legitimising attacks and may inspire IS sympathisers in Denmark to carry out attacks.

CTA assesses that there exists capacity in Denmark to carry out terrorist attacks using easily accessible weapons such as stabbing weapons, firearms, incendiary bombs and small improvised explosive devices, or other readily available means. Such simple attacks can be carried out after a short period of planning, or without any planning at all. The attacks in Nice on 14 July and in Berlin on 19 December 2016, where a lorry was used against a large crowd of people, have shown that a simple attack can have a large impact.

Persons without experience from the conflict zone who are inspired by propaganda or supported by militant Islamists tend to carry out simple attacks using easily accessible means following a short planning phase. These attacks are often carried out by a lone actor or a small group within the local area of the perpetrators. CTA assesses that this type of attack constitutes the most likely in Denmark.

CTA assesses that the presence of returnees from Syria and Iraq who possess military skills and combat experience, and individuals with a similar capability obtained from e.g. criminal circles, increases the threat of simple high-impact attacks and serial attacks, in which one person or group carries out multiple consecutive attacks. Contact to criminal circles may facilitate access to weapons and explosives.

CTA assesses that IS' capability to carry out relatively complex attacks in the West means that attacks with several attackers and against multiple targets could also be carried out in Denmark. A strong radicalisation and brutalisation of the perpetrators may add to the brutality of a terrorist attack, e.g. the risk of suicide attacks.

Although IS to some extent has used chemical weapons in Syria/Iraq, it is the assessment of CTA that there continues to be a limited capability in Denmark to carry out attacks with chemical agents. CTA assesses that there is a very limited capability to carry out attacks with biological or radiological materials. CTA assesses that there is no capability to carry out attacks in Denmark with nuclear material.

CTA assesses that there in Denmark is capability to use drones for simple attacks, for reconnaissance or for intimidation, but that the capability of militant Islamists to cause serious harmful effect in Denmark through the use of drones is limited.

CTA assesses that militant Islamist groups do not have the capability to carry out targeted and destructive cyber attacks against IT and telecommunications infrastructure at a level where it would affect Danish society, but that they are attempting to acquire such a capability. CTA believes that militant Islamist groups continue to use simple cyber harassment and hacking to give an exaggerated impression of their capability.

In all these areas capability to commit terror can be enhanced if sensitive information and access can be obtained through recruitment, i.e. of a so-called *insider*.

Other terror threats

CTA assesses that the ethnic and religious dimensions of the conflicts in Syria and Iraq may lead to confrontations between individuals affiliated with the various related groups in Denmark that could turn violent. CTA assesses that the terror threat to Denmark emanating from such confrontations is limited.

There are left- and right-wing extremist circles in Denmark that are prepared to use violence to promote their political agenda. CTA assesses that a terror threat emanates from individuals in these circles, but that this threat is limited.

Left-wing extremist violence may be aimed at political opponents as well as organisations and companies to whom these circles ascribe a symbolic value. CTA assesses that there is an increased focus on the refugee situation among individuals with extreme right-wing sympathies and that a threat emanates from them that could be aimed at e.g. asylum centres, refugees, religious minorities as well as related authorities. CTA assesses that actions from right-wing extremists may lead to a backlash from militant Islamists or persons within left-wing extremist circles in Denmark.

The social media are increasingly being used for making threatening and hostile comments, for example against public figures. While the majority of these comments do not lead to actual attack planning, CTA assesses that such commentary may lead people who are mentally unstable or easily influenced, to commit acts of violence that could constitute acts of terrorism.

The terror threat to Danes and Danish interests abroad

CTA assesses that there is a terror threat to Danish interests abroad. This is particularly true in countries or regions where militant Islamists with capability are present, where individuals or groups can be found who have declared their loyalty to IS or AQ, or where there are militant Islamists with a special focus on Denmark. An increased number of returned foreign fighters from the conflict in Syria/Iraq may result in an increased threat against western targets in a number of countries in the Middle East, North and West Africa as well as Central, South and Southeast Asia. In addition to this, militant Islamists abroad may become more focused on carrying out attacks against western, including Danish, targets abroad as it becomes increasingly difficult to get to Europe. The influence from militant Islamist groups affiliated with IS or AQ is rising in a number of countries in Asia, including the Philippines, Indonesia and Bangladesh.

CTA assesses that the threat may be towards western interests such as diplomatic representations and companies as well as towards western tourists. Attacks in 2015 and 2016 against hotels and other tourist destinations illustrate that tourists and locations where Westerners stay are of increasing interest to militant Islamists.

CTA assesses that the threat of kidnapping associated with the threat of terrorism is more significant in areas where militant Islamist groups are active, including conflict zones and neighbouring areas. Kidnappings provide militant Islamist groups with both financial means and propaganda. CTA assesses that the targeting by militant Islamists of victims to be kidnapped is often pragmatic and opportunist rather than based on a wish to kidnap certain nationalities. CTA assesses that the very brutal conduct of IS in particular has increased the threat of being killed in connection with a kidnapping.

Danish diplomatic representations and other Danish interests abroad, e.g. employees of Danish companies, may be seen as symbolic targets, allowing for the possibility of targeting Denmark without actually carrying out 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 other larger Western countries.

CTA assesses that the risk of Danes and Danish interests being targeted by a terrorist attack increases if they are directly identifiable as Danish. Moreover, Danes may be

hit at random by terrorist attacks when visiting places that may constitute local terrorist targets, e.g. large crowds in connection with demonstrations, or 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 capability for such attacks.

CTA assesses that militant Islamist groups still consider international air traffic, including airports, a particularly attractive target and continuously seek to attack it. Militant Islamist groups will be particularly focused on countries where the security level is perceived to be low.