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Assessment of the Terror Threat to Denmark

Summary

The terrorist attacks in Copenhagen on 14 and 15 February 2015 confirm that the terror threat to Denmark is significant. There are individuals who have the intention and capacity to commit terrorist attacks in Denmark, and attacks can take place without any prior intelligence-based indications. The risk of falling victim to a terrorist attack in Denmark remains limited.

CTA assesses that the terror threat mainly emanates from individuals and small groups with a militant Islamist outlook. CTA assesses that propaganda from militant Islamist groups in e.g. Syria and Iraq contributes to the radicalisation of individuals and circles in Denmark and to individuals travelling abroad to join these groups.

CTA assesses that a terror threat emanates from individuals who move within militant Islamist circles. CTA further assesses that individuals who are influenced by militant Islamist propaganda and at the same time linked to criminal circles with a high degree of proneness to violence may become increasingly significant to the terror threat.

CTA assesses that returnees from the conflict in Syria and Iraq pose a particular terror threat to Denmark because of the skills they may have obtained. CTA assesses that a capacity to conduct terrorist attacks, which can be carried out after short planning, using easily accessible weapons, is present in Denmark. Radicalised individuals with capacity to commit acts of violence, acquired in a conflict zone or in Denmark, increase the threat of simple attacks with higher impact and of serial attacks.

CTA assesses that current militant Islamist propaganda may influence some people to carry out attacks against symbolic targets such as individuals, institutions and events that may be perceived as offensive to Islam, Jewish targets, defence and security authorities or other authorities/persons in authority and unprotected civilian targets.

CTA assesses that the calls in militant Islamist propaganda for attacks against countries participating in the coalition against ISIL may aggravate the terror threat against Danish interests abroad.

Developments in the global threat picture

The global threat picture, and thus the terror threat to Denmark, is still to a great extent affected by militant Islamist terrorist groups abroad.¹ The most important factor in the threat picture emanates from the conflict in Syria and Iraq where the militant Islamist groups involved in the conflict, primarily ISIL², are disseminating propaganda, including to a Western audience. The territorial gains and accessible messages of ISIL have generated considerable support for the group among militant Islamists, including in Europe.

At the same time, the conflict zone in Syria and Iraq continues to attract a large number of people from around the world, especially from the region itself, but also from Europe. In addition, the conflict zone has provided a safe haven for experienced attack planners and explosives experts from other combat zones to plan attacks e.g. against the West.

After the international coalition started its campaign against ISIL in Syria and Iraq in August 2014, militant Islamist propaganda has called for attacks against targets in countries that are part of the coalition. The propaganda is being spread via social media, which enables a rapid dissemination of messages, as the propaganda is, to a great extent, passed on locally from individuals to potential sympathisers, including in Europe.

The propaganda explicitly calls for individuals to attack defence and security authorities, Jewish targets, perceived offenders of Islam and unprotected civilian targets. CTA assesses that because of the many people in the Middle East and the West who sympathise with militant Islamism there is an increased threat when it comes to this form of attacks. There have been several attacks or attack plans against Western targets in the Middle East, one of which was aimed at a Danish target in Saudi Arabia, and in several Western countries such as Canada, Australia, Belgium, Great Britain and the United States. CTA assesses that the terrorist attacks in Paris on 07 to 09 January 2015 and in Copenhagen on 14 and 15 February 2015 may also have been motivated by current militant Islamist propaganda. The majority of these attacks or attack plans have been carried out by individuals who have not been to a conflict zone.

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

² ISIL stands for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. The group is also called ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). The group calls itself the Islamic State (IS). In June 2014, ISIL proclaimed the establishment of a caliphate within the areas they controlled in Syria and Iraq.

ISIL and other militant Islamist groups in the conflict zone are still trying to attract individuals from abroad, including the West. The groups may profit from the ideological symbolism that lies in being in conflict with a coalition led by the West. On the other hand, the combat capacity of the groups is also affected by the efforts against them. If the militant Islamist groups in the area are weakened, foreign fighters may choose or be forced to leave the area. This could increase the terror threat in the countries they return to, including European countries. The threat may therefore change within short time.

The ongoing international counter-terrorism efforts have had an impact on al-Qaida's network in a number of the world's hot spots and reduced its ability - but not the intention - to carry out large-scale attacks against the West. At the same time, militant Islamist groups have gained more leeway in areas such as Libya. In North and West Africa, several militant Islamist groups, one of which is Boko Haram in Nigeria, have sworn allegiance to ISIL. The reduced international presence in Afghanistan may create renewed room to manoeuvre for militant Islamists in the country.

ISIL's proclamation of a caliphate has challenged al-Qaida's previous position within the global militant Islamist movement. This may lead to an increased wish to enhance profiles, thus increasing the threat of a terrorist attack e.g. in Europe.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, results in a continued terror threat against Israeli and Jewish targets in the West.

There have been examples within both right- and left-wing extremist circles in Europe of a continued will to use violence, and there have been several attacks against political opponents, minorities and state institutions. Right-wing extremist circles maintain their focus on criticising Islam. There have been examples of attacks against Muslim targets and of violent clashes between right-wing extremists and Islamist groups. A further escalation may elevate the terror threat in Europe.

The terror threat to Denmark

The terrorist attacks in Copenhagen on 14 and 15 February 2015 confirm that the terror threat to Denmark is significant. There are individuals who have the intention and capacity to commit terrorist attacks in Denmark, and attacks can take place without any prior intelligence-based indications.

However, the possibility of carrying out a terrorist attack continues to depend on national counter-measures. The risk of falling victim to a terrorist attack in Denmark therefore remains limited.

CTA assesses that the terror threat mainly emanates from individuals and small groups with a militant Islamist outlook. They are motivated by the perception that Islam is under attack by the West, by the cartoon case, and by Denmark's active foreign and security policy, as most recently illustrated by Denmark's participation in the international coalition against ISIL in Iraq.

The militant Islamist propaganda coming from militant Islamist groups in the conflict zone contributes to the radicalisation of individuals and circles in Denmark and to individuals from Denmark choosing to go to the conflict zone to join these groups. Other groups, e.g. al-Qaida and its affiliates, also use propaganda to exert influence.

CTA assesses that militant Islamist propaganda may in particular have a radicalising effect on socially marginalised young people who are looking for an identity. Furthermore, certain groups or communities may be particularly conducive to the radicalisation process. These include staying in a conflict zone, prisons or being part of a criminal gang. Virtual communities on social media may also have a conducive effect when it comes to radicalisation.

CTA assesses that there are still individuals who join militant Islamist circles in Denmark, and that some of the activities taking place within these circles include recruitment, radicalisation, facilitation of people to conflict zones, money collection and dissemination of propaganda. CTA assesses that there is a widespread sympathy for ISIL within these circles and that a terror threat emanates from individuals and groups within the Islamist circles or in their periphery.

CTA assesses that individuals who are influenced by militant Islamist propaganda, who at the same time are linked to criminal circles where there is a high degree of proneness to violence, and who are able to build capacity through access to weapons, may be increasingly significant to the terror threat against Denmark. CTA assesses that the terrorist attacks in Copenhagen on 14 and 15 February 2015 are examples of this threat.

Militant Islamist groups in Syria and Iraq continue to attract people from Denmark. CTA assesses that the number of individuals who have travelled from Denmark to the conflict zone totals at least 115, but the number may be higher. CTA assesses that the

majority of those who leave Denmark join ISIL. These individuals are mainly young Sunni-Muslim men. A small number of women have also left Denmark for the conflict zone.

Those who leave Denmark comprise newcomers as well as individuals who have previously been to the conflict zone. CTA assesses that approximately half of those who have gone abroad are now back in Denmark, while a quarter of them remain in the conflict zone. CTA assesses that two thirds of these individuals have been in the conflict zone for more than a year. The remaining travellers are located elsewhere abroad. CTA assesses that at least 19 travellers from Denmark have been killed in Syria and Iraq.

CTA still assesses that returnees from the conflict zone in Syria and Iraq pose a particular terrorist threat against Denmark because of the experience and skills they may have gained and because they may have become even more radicalised, brutalised and prone to violence. CTA assesses that the terror threat may increase if the number of returnees with combat experience and capacity from the conflict zone increases.

CTA assesses that at least half of the returnees are part of militant Islamist circles within which they may achieve a special status that can be used for promoting radicalisation and recruitment.

Thus, the terror threat to Denmark derives from individuals and small groups who

- return from a conflict zone. While staying in the conflict zone, these individuals may have obtained combat experience and the capacity to carry out a terrorist attack,
- have not been to a conflict zone but may have obtained capacity within other contexts, for example from individuals with experience from a conflict zone. Several recent attacks or attack plans in the West have been done by individuals who have not wanted or been able to go to a conflict zone,
- travel to Denmark from abroad.

Attacks can be carried out either upon instructions or at one's own initiative.

CTA assesses that militant Islamist propaganda that calls for simple terrorist attacks to be carried out through the use of easily accessible means, like e.g. a vehicle, has the effect that the execution of such attacks depends on motivation and to a lesser extent on capacity.

CTA assesses that the current militant Islamist propaganda may influence people to carry out attacks against symbolic targets such as individuals, institutions and events that may be perceived as offensive to Islam, Jewish targets, defence and security authorities or other authorities/persons in authority. CTA assesses that symbolic targets are and will remain primary targets for militant Islamists. CTA assesses that random civilian targets and infrastructure such as aviation and public transport are also regarded as attractive targets by militant Islamists.

CTA assesses that a small number of individuals, including Kurds and Shiites, have left Denmark to go to the conflict zone in Syria and Iraq to fight against militant Islamist groups or other armed opposition groups. CTA assesses that the ethnic/sectarian dimensions of the conflict in Syria and Iraq may lead to confrontations between the affected groups in Denmark.

There are political extremist circles in Denmark that are prepared to use violence to further their political agenda. The violence may be directed against political opponents, certain minority groups such as immigrants, state institutions and foreign embassies as well as organisations and companies deemed to have a symbolic value. CTA assesses that there is a limited terror threat from individuals or groups who belong to such circles or identify with their views. They may find their motivation in perceived injustices, terrorist attacks in Denmark or abroad or through staying in conflict zones. Both left- and right-wing extremist circles are known to be in contact with extremist circles abroad.

CTA assesses that the capacity exists in Denmark to carry out terrorist attacks using easily accessible weapons, such as stabbing weapons, firearms, incendiary bombs and small IEDS, or through the use of other readily available means. Such attacks can be carried out spontaneously or after short planning. Terrorist attacks and attack planning in Europe in recent years have typically involved one or two individuals with no combat zone experience who at their own initiative planned a firearms attack against a symbolic target.

CTA assesses that the presence of returnees from Syria and Iraq with military skills and combat experience and individuals with capacity from e.g. criminal circles increases the threat of simple attacks with higher impact and serial attacks, in which an individual or group carries out a series of consecutive attacks.

CTA assesses that firearms and IEDs constitute the most frequently preferred weapons in connection with terrorist attacks carried out or planned by militant Islamists.

CTA assesses that the capacity to carry out large-scale, complex terrorist attacks in Denmark requiring multiple attackers and different targets, lengthy planning and high material expenses is limited.

CTA assesses that there are individuals in Denmark with the capacity to carry out simple attacks using chemical or biological agents which can be acquired online. CTA assesses that terrorist groups do not have the capacity to carry out terrorist attacks in Denmark using radiological or nuclear material. CTA assesses that terrorist groups do not have the capacity to carry out targeted and destructive cyber attacks against IT and telecommunications infrastructure at a level where it would affect Danish society, but that militant Islamist groups seek to acquire cyber capacity.

The terror threat to Danes and Danish interests abroad

CTA assesses that there is a terror threat to Danish interests in countries where militant Islamist groups regard Western interests as attractive terrorist targets.

CTA assesses that the recent calls made in militant Islamist propaganda for attacks against countries participating in the coalition against ISIL may increase the terror threat to Danish interests in countries where one or more of the following conditions apply:

- There is a presence of militant Islamists with a capacity.
- There is a presence of returnee fighters with an acquired capacity from the conflict in Syria and Iraq.
- There is a presence of individuals or groups with a declared loyalty towards ISIL and/or al-Qaida.
- There is a presence of militant Islamists focusing on Denmark.

Additionally, the terrorist attacks in Paris and Copenhagen may entail an increased focus on cartoons that are perceived as offensive by militant Islamists. This could contribute to an increased attention towards Denmark.

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

CTA assesses that attacks against Danish targets abroad may be carried out with the use of simple and easily accessible means but that large or complex attacks, including bomb attacks, may also take place, especially in countries where militant Islamist groups already possess the capacity for such attacks. Individuals who are thought to represent Denmark may also be exposed to an increased threat of kidnapping. CTA assesses that the threat of death in connection with a kidnapping has increased.

The Danish diplomatic representations and other Danish presence abroad may be perceived as symbolic targets, enabling direct strikes against Denmark without attacking in Denmark itself. Danish representations may also become targets of terrorist attacks because terrorists may perceive them as less secure than, for example, the representations of other larger Western countries. The risk of Danes and Danish interests falling victim to a terrorist attack increases if they are directly identifiable as Danish.

In addition, Danes risk falling victim to acts of terrorism abroad if they stay in conflict zones or places that may be local terrorist targets, including locations where many Westerners congregate, large crowds or similar.

CTA assesses that militant Islamist groups and networks still seek to strike against the international airline traffic.