

Summary

What is the nature of jihadi terrorism in the Netherlands at the beginning of the 21st century, if we base our analysis on information about this phenomenon that has been collected by the police? That is the core question of this study. In order to increase the understanding of jihadi terrorism, the knowledge collected by the police during criminal investigations into jihadi activities has been analysed systematically. When we refer to jihadi activities, we mean activities which are aimed at making a contribution to the armed struggle being conducted by radical islamists against the West and against other perceived enemies of Islam. For the purpose of this project, we analysed a total of twelve (large-scale) criminal investigations conducted in the Netherlands between July 2001 and July 2005. In doing so, we have sketched the portrait of an era. The most recent criminal investigation we analysed was conducted in the spring of 2005. We cannot make any projection about how the phenomenon of jihadism may have since changed under the influence of national or international developments.

We have based our research on police files. This entails considerable restrictions. Firstly, the police are not aware of all jihadi activities nor do they initiate criminal investigations into all jihadi activities of which they are aware. Secondly, we only selected a portion of the cases investigated during the period studied. This selection may have influenced our findings. Thirdly, we have based our research on the information collected by investigation teams who focused on reconstructing terrorist crimes and submitting these to the court, substantiated by evidence. This focus of the investigation teams, their investigation hypotheses and the related selection and interpretation of information have also influenced our perception. The findings presented below must be seen in this light.

In order to obtain an objective analysis of the available investigation material, but also because different criminal investigations into jihadi activities are often interrelated, we considered the selected investigation material *in its entirety*, and chose to rely less on the structures of the separate criminal investigations. The *raw* empirical material was subsequently restructured, so that groups of cooperating persons and joint activities could be examined together. In analysing this material, we focused on three dimensions: (1) jihadi cooperations;¹ (2) the activities carried out within these cooperations, and (3) the jihadi actors.

This summary provides a brief overview of the most important research findings. In the final chapter of this report, the findings are discussed together from a more theoretical perspective.

1 We use the term cooperation to refer to cooperating actors or cooperating groups of actors.

Jihadi cooperations

The jihadi cooperations, as they emerge from the aggregate of investigation data that we analysed, may be characterised on the basis of *largely similar features*. Persons who are the driving force behind these cooperations are inspired by a Salafist-jihadi body of thought aimed at violence with world-wide pretensions. They propagate this body of thought and implement it through extremely diverse activities. In spite of differences in priority, they generally perform these activities both at home and abroad.

Although there are also persons involved in these cooperations who only make indirect contributions or do so with less ideological enthusiasm, in this report we refer to all persons involved as jihadi *actors*. Without the opportunist or less conscious participation of some of these actors, the cooperations would – after all – function differently. The composition of these groups is mixed, partly because persons with previous criminal convictions, converts, and sympathisers become involved in jihadi cooperations, in addition to persons with very diverse jihadi or other backgrounds. Such heterogeneity also applies to the social and cultural features of these groups. Within all the jihadi cooperations examined, the participating actors have different national and geographical roots. They speak different languages and have different cultural backgrounds. In addition to this, we found that in all cooperations, persons from different age categories participate together in the activities, and in some groups both men and women are active. The cooperations only appear to be homogeneous in terms of religion: nearly all of the actors base their religious convictions on the Sunni movement within Islam. The common religion is just one binding factor that explains why specific people are attracted to jihadi cooperations. In particular, the ideology as propagated by the vanguard is an important binding factor. The majority of actors, however, seem to be attracted mainly by one or more *aspects* of this ideology, such as the theme of worldwide injustice against Muslims, rebellion against existing social systems, or rigid guidelines for a pure existence. Some actors also join the jihadi cooperations primarily because these groups include people who may provide essential daily necessities. Other binding factors are joint activities, social advantages, but also role models. After all, role models and other people who give direction to the actors can guarantee social and ideological stability and cohesion within jihadi groups. In this respect, they possess ‘binding qualities’ as well. The qualities that give these persons a form of power and authority often include religious and ideological expertise, life experience or experience in combat, and the fact that they have the power to both reward and punish other people.

Several structural characteristics of jihadi cooperations ensure solid connections among the actors individually and the groups or clusters of actors as a whole. Because they share long-lasting social foundations (relationships based on mutual trust), real and virtual meeting places, and key figures, these

cooperations not only exhibit solid internal cohesion, but are also dynamically *interrelated*. As a result of this, they – as groups or clusters – are part of a broader international jihadi movement.

Our analysis reveals that the presence of persons who possess an ideological or militant frame of reference based on experiences in the Islamic world is – or was – crucial to the formation or consolidation of all jihadi cooperations we studied. These ‘*heartland-oriented*’ actors mobilise and/or attract people. In a Western context, they have a relatively strong ability to ‘sell’ a coherent jihadi narrative. Due to their specific qualities, contacts and experiences – which are beneficial to their credibility and social status – they often serve as examples or role models to others. Complex interactions between these persons on the one hand and receptive persons on the other hand – in particular illegal foreigners and converts, and Muslims who grew up or were educated locally – give crucial momentum to radicalisation processes.

Interactions of this kind ensure that jihadi groups can function, in spite of the absence of any formal hierarchical structures. Although one cooperation may have a greater degree of organisational substance than the other, the relationships are always informal, fluid and strongly decentralised, whereby group members enjoy a relatively large degree of freedom to improvise when conducting various tasks. The cooperations are never strictly organised in a vertical, hierarchical manner. We found linked series of social connections created by informal *dependence-receptivity relationships*. Actors who are dependent on the commitment and capacities of others often give direction to persons who are receptive to them. Such relationships have a relative nature, for guiding actors often appear to be receptive themselves to the direction of other actors at home and abroad who take advantage of their commitment.

Activities

The criminal investigations we analysed show that actors in the Netherlands develop extremely various activities. Almost without exception, these activities show how strongly the jihadi cooperations we studied were interwoven with international jihadi networks. In this context, it was revealed again and again that the actors – both at home and abroad – are very mobile, and appear to prefer face-to-face contacts for coordination and exchange of information rather than communication at a distance (Internet and telephone). We can classify their activities by type.

With respect to activities aimed at converting, moulding, teaching and training people, there generally is an interaction between mobilisation and self-selection. In other words: jihadi role models seek receptive persons, but they are also often sought out at the same time.

In the groups and networks we studied, the actors who actually intend to commit attacks, and who perform preparatory acts, are often inspired by role models and Al Qaeda views, but they usually act relatively independently and with much improvisation. In this context, they frequently seem to act in an opportunity-based manner, and seem to make no fundamental distinction between national or international targets. If actors we studied utter threats to persons or organisations, these threats are very seldom made in the public domain, and their main objective seems to be to incite provocation and agitation among members of the jihadi clusters.

Many of the numerous acts with which actors support jihadi core activities are criminal in nature: forgery of documents, document fraud, burglary and robbery and – to a lesser degree – drugs trafficking and production, and credit card fraud. They also facilitate activities by raising funds or by providing accommodation to extremist brothers. Money and goods (such as stolen passports) are often exchanged personally or using couriers. To be able to travel, actors frequently use stolen public transport passes and passports. This particularly applies to illegal actors. The facilitation of travel movements appears to be a business in itself within the jihadi movement.

Meanwhile, jihadis are aware that they may be under surveillance. Their activities in the area of shielding and protecting themselves vary. According to the police, these actors are also often well informed of the way in which the investigation services operate. This may complicate police work. As most contacts and appointments between jihadis occur face-to-face, it is difficult for investigation and security services to monitor the activities of these actors at a distance.

Finally, the investigation material can teach us something about the way in which jihadi activities are embedded in the daily lives of the actors. In particular, this material provides an insight into the places where jihadi actors usually manifest themselves and where they meet others. The most characteristic meeting places include call shops, Internet cafes, asylum seekers centres, prisons, and Islamic centres.

Actors

In the twelve criminal investigations we examined, a total of 113 different actors emerge who had been active on Dutch soil during the period studied. In this population of actors we found *people with various life stories and significantly different backgrounds and motives*. Although it is not possible to identify clear terrorist profiles, four conspicuous groups of persons emerged, to which similar circumstances and related motivations may be applicable. Firstly, *illegal immigrants* are amply represented in all jihadi cooperations. Jihadi groups may provide illegal immigrants with essential necessities of life or other needs, such as accommodation, forged or genuine documents,

employment, social assistance, respect, social status and a purpose in life. Secondly, many of the actors participating in the population we analysed were *former or current addicts, and people with criminal records*, who have given their lives a new direction by embracing jihadism and the strong and clear Salafist doctrine which is regarded as pure. Thirdly, the jihadi groups are attractive to the category of individuals who are '*seekers*' with existential or identity questions, because these jihadi groups meet their personal desires to find meaning in life, or provide them with social ties, a sense of structure in daily life, and a positive self-image. And, fourthly, we distinguish *idealists and political activists*, for whom social discontent is the most important motivation for their involvement in the international jihadi movement.

In conclusion

All in all, our findings show the complexity and ambiguity, in particular, in which the phenomenon of jihadi terrorism presented itself in the Netherlands in the period studied. We are dealing with extremely fluid and informal cooperations, which are part of a broader movement by virtue of their mutual and transnational interrelatedness as decentralised groups. In addition, the jihadi cooperations often develop a large variety of activities that are spread over a large area, whereby the target of such activities – and thus the related threat – is sometimes only identified in retrospect. Where direct preparatory acts for attacks may set alarm bells ringing, the broad jihadi movement can be supported and preserved by more subtle activities, such as raising funds, document fraud or other forms of facilitating crimes. Jihadi activities aimed at providing cover are often as varied as the other activities, and are performed systematically.

At an individual level, as well, the situation appears to be complex. The jihadi cooperations we examined derive their capacities from people with extremely divergent backgrounds, origins, ages and motives. Because of their rather mixed and variable socio-cultural compositions, the jihadi communities are hard to characterise. Likewise, it is not possible to provide clear risk profiles of jihadi individuals.

Jihadi terrorism is a complex phenomenon. Researchers who have the relative luxury of analysing this phenomenon in detail and in retrospect have an easier job than authorities and organisations who have to combat terrorism as it takes place. This situation, however, makes the findings described in this report even more valuable. Knowledge and understanding of the nature of jihadi terrorism are, after all, necessary for developing and testing scientific theories in this field, as well as for developing practical ways to tackle this phenomenon.