

BACKGROUND OF JIHAD RECRUITS IN THE NETHERLANDS

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Introduction

This memorandum gives a brief characterisation of persons in the Netherlands who are going through a process of recruitment for the violent jihad. The complexity of the phenomenon makes it is very difficult, if not impossible, to provide a complete profile of these persons. The AIVD has established that the people who fall under the spell of the 'holy war' against the supposed enemies of Islam have wide-ranging backgrounds and that the circumstances under which this takes places are equally wide-ranging. Consequently, recruitment rather involves individual development paths than a group process.

For this reason this memorandum is mainly a general description of the processes and circumstances in which potential Islamist terrorists in the Netherlands find themselves. It gives an outline of the latest state of affairs in circles of radical Muslims in the Netherlands. The recruitment processes were earlier described in detail in the paper 'Recruitment for the Jihad in the Netherlands', so this memorandum can be seen as a supplement to that paper.

The first part of this memorandum deals with circumstances such as ideology and motives. Then a description is given of the various backgrounds of persons going through recruitment processes, followed by some details about recruitment practices, such as places, methods and effects. In the final paragraphs some conclusions are presented.

Circumstances

Ideology

The ideology of Salafism and Wahhabism – related but separate schools preaching a radical Islamic ideology – forms a major basis for Islamist terrorism. These forms of Islam serve as an important factor to bind the Islamist-terrorist networks, organisations and individuals together. In addition to this, the 'original' Arab-based form of Islamic fundamentalism is now intermingling with a 'European' ethnicised political form of radical Islam. Theologically, the latter does not deviate from original fundamentalism, but it is characterised by an awareness of its special position in a Western, hence

supposedly hostile environment, like the Netherlands. The European radical Islam believes to be faced with an increasing polarisation in society, but at the same time it seeks to reinforce this polarisation.

Foreign motives

The fight in Iraq, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the war in Chechnya and the Islamist fight against the US and the West continue to raise the interest and sympathy of a wide range of young Muslims in the Netherlands. This fuels and reinforces their susceptibility to, and interest in, a radical interpretation of Islam. The AIVD believes that this trend adds to a growing risk that the fascination for the jihad among young Muslims – in particular those of Moroccan origin, but also other young Muslims – might lead to participation in the jihad, either as a result of influencing by recruiters or on their own initiative.

Domestic motives

It can be concluded that a growing number of Muslims feel treated disrespectfully by opinion-makers and opinion-leaders in social intercourse. In addition, from their perspective, the government's attitude is not impartial enough or not impartial at all. These feelings are cherished by a small group of radical Muslims, but they also exist among a large part of the Muslims who feel loyal - and who commit themselves - to the democratic principles of our state. In particular young Muslims from the category of second-generation and third-generation immigrants seem to feel strongly about the supposed alienation between society and Muslim citizens. The group of young people who feel treated disrespectfully is a major potential target for radicalisation and possibly recruitment processes.

Persons going through recruitment processes

What categories of people are susceptible to the radical range of ideas propagated and used by recruiters? In the Netherlands a tendency has been established towards recruitment of converted Muslims and immigrant teenagers of Islamic origin. But in a way, interest in radical ideas has become an autonomous phenomenon in the Netherlands, meaning that even without any external influencing or incentive some people are embracing the radical fundamentalist line of thinking. This is how some Dutch Muslims who are now preaching the religious ideology on which Islamist terrorism is based embraced this ideology.

Young and well-educated

Over the past eighteen months the group of young men susceptible to recruitment appeared to be younger than before. In certain groups of young Muslims the desire to take part in the jihad seems to be part of their youth culture. Their fascination for violence, as displayed in visual material and on Internet sites, is remarkable. It cannot be

ruled out, however, that for part of these youngsters their radical attitude is just a means to impress their age group.

Among those who display a fascination for the violent jihad are more and more highly-educated men. In addition, it has been established that also women are sympathetic to the violent jihad. As far as we know, however, they do not play a prominent role in recruitment processes.

Categories

We can distinguish three categories of recruits. First of all, it is remarkable that even a small number of young Dutch indigenous converts have declared themselves prepared to support or join the jihad. There have been a number of cases of indigenous converts from other countries who devoted themselves to the jihad, their activities ranging from training and support to committing attacks. An example is the 28-year-old Australian Islamic convert David Hicks, now in US custody at Guantánamo Bay, who fought alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan. Another well-known example in this category is the British 'shoe bomber' Richard Reed.

The second group within the Dutch context are migrants who relatively recently settled in the Netherlands. They are persons who recently acquired an official residency status or a temporary residence permit and persons who are illegally resident in the Netherlands. Many of them hardly speak any Dutch or not at all. Their income comes from various sources. Based on current information, it can be concluded that the number of recruits with this background is small.

The third category is a variety of young second-generation or third-generation immigrants – especially teenagers – who were born and bred in the Netherlands or moved to the Netherlands at a very young age. Most of them, but definitely not all, are of Moroccan or North-African origin. They have a reasonable to good command of the Dutch language, whereas they hardly speak any Arabic or not at all. The educational level of this group varies widely. Both highly-educated persons (pre-university students and academic students/graduates) and persons with a low level of education are going through recruitment processes.

It is characteristic of part of this group of young second-generation and third-generation immigrants that they seem to experience a lack of respect for their ethnic-religious background in society. These feelings play an important role in the identity crisis in which they find themselves. As a consequence, it often happens that youth in this category, those of Moroccan origin especially, turn their back on the Dutch society. As opposed to other young immigrants who prefer a liberal perception of religion and a social development in the Dutch society, some of them resort to isolation or to radical Islamic movements.

The complex of interrelated sentiments like (a lack of) self-respect, commitment to the Islamic ideal, solidarity with the oppressed Muslims and identity problems is a major

point of departure for recruiters. In some cases these sentiments are fuelled by recruiters, but in other cases they develop independently. Against this background, the radical solution presenting itself to these young people - i.e. a role in the fight between right (Islam) and wrong (the enemies of Islam) - helps them to find their position, direction and identity in life. These young people believe that Islam gives them answers to the existential questions with which they are struggling. To young Muslims with a criminal background the radical religious ideology may present them with an opportunity to achieve a clean and irreversible break with their past.

The religious attitude of the parents of these young people, whether orthodox or liberal, does not seem to be of much influence. Some recruits in the group of second-generation and third-generation youngsters are in conflict with their parents. They believe that their parents' attitude towards the Dutch politics and culture is far too passive. The radicalised Muslim youth feel that the Dutch moral values are incompatible with Islam and they believe that their parents fail to make a stand against this. This may more or less alienate the children from their parents.

Recruitment practices

Places of recruitment

The radicalised young Muslims meet each other in or near mosques, but not exclusively in places of worship. Sessions also frequently take place in private homes or hired meeting rooms. The Internet is increasingly used as a meeting point as well. Remarkable is the growing use of prisons as places of recruitment. Detained recruiters aim their activities at young prisoners whose detention proves to make them very susceptible to radical religious ideas that hold out a promise of escape from their criminal past.

Methods

Recruiters are purposefully searching for potential recruits. Their approaching of these people - in some cases even during detention - marks the beginning of a process in which the recruiters gradually drive the potential recruits apart from their family and friends in order to be able to control and manipulate them and, to begin with, indoctrinate them with the radical Islamic range of ideas. Recruitment is a gradual process which requires tact and discretion from the recruiter. The process is not completed before a recruit actively devotes himself to the violent jihad, either by means of support activities or by taking part in the fight.

Effects

As a result of these recruitment practices there are a small but growing number of radical Muslims in the Netherlands who are willing to devote themselves to the violent jihad. In November 2002, the AIVD estimated that some dozens of persons in the Netherlands could be seen as recruits. Since then this number has not been reduced, but not notably grown either. About some of these recruits it has become known that they went to a

training camp. Others are mainly supporting Islamist terrorism by means of facilitating services such as providing money or passports. And, for their part, some devote themselves to winning over other potential recruits. The cases of recruitment for the jihad with which the Netherlands has been confronted, also in the past year, are no isolated incidents. As it was already concluded in the paper 'Recruitment for the Jihad in the Netherlands' in 2002, it is a trend.

Conclusion

The AIVD concludes that a certain autonomous basis for support to the politically-oriented form of radical Islam has developed among young Muslims in the Netherlands. A number of radical Muslims have devoted themselves to the violent jihad within a European political perception of radical Islam. Young persons are driven by both foreign incentives and domestic developments.

The recruits have a wide range of backgrounds. The AIVD sees more and more younger persons – in some cases minors – going through recruitment processes. Those who devote themselves to the violent jihad are young second-generation or third-generation immigrants, and in some cases also Dutch indigenous Islamic converts. The backgrounds and motives of the first group vary widely.

Recruitment activities may take place during sessions at private homes and in prisons. Persons who find themselves in a vulnerable position are purposefully approached by recruiters who seek to control and manipulate them in order to recruit them for the violent jihad.

The above-sketches developments continue to pose a considerable threat to the Dutch society and the international legal order. These developments prompt the government to identify and counter radicalisation processes at an early stage. It is important, however, to prevent any stigmatisation and alienation, since polarisation is grist to the mill of politically-oriented radical Muslims. The government's approach of this security problem was described in the memorandum '*Terrorisme en Bescherming van de Samenleving*' (Terrorism and the protection of society) of 24 June 2003 (Parliamentary reports II 2002/03, 27 925, no. 94).