

COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

DENMARK: EXTREMISM & COUNTER EXTREMISM

Two people were killed and five injured during [two attacks in Copenhagen, Denmark](#) on February 14-15, 2015. The first attack occurred at a free speech event hosted by Swedish cartoonist Lars Vilks on February 14, 2015. Vilks has faced numerous death threats since publishing cartoons in 2007 depicting the Prophet Muhammad. The second attack occurred at Copenhagen's Great Synagogue, where one person was shot dead and two others wounded. Danish police shot and killed the suspected perpetrator— reportedly known to Danish intelligence— on February 15, 2015.

The threat of Islamic extremism in Denmark has grown since 2005, when images of Mohammed drawn by Danish cartoonist Kurt Vertergaard were published in the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*. Danish embassies in Iran, Lebanon, Pakistan, and Syria were attacked between 2005 and 2008 and there have been multiple attempts made on Vertergaard's life, including an [attack](#) by an axe-wielding extremist who forced himself into Vertergaard's home in 2010.

Denmark has sought to strengthen domestic counter-extremism efforts, including by launching an innovative rehabilitation program for returning foreign fighters. Denmark is a member of the U.S.-led coalition against ISIS.

Overview

Over the past decade, Danish authorities have identified Islamic extremist ideology as a serious and imminent threat. In particular, authorities have been concerned by the threat from al-Qaeda since the publication of controversial cartoons in 2005 and 2008. More recently, Denmark's participation in the U.S.-led coalition against ISIS has put the country at higher risk of Islamist attacks. In January 2015, a user on the top ISIS web forum proclaimed, "The day of punishment [for] Denmark is near, in taking revenge and defending the messenger of Allah," (ISIS web discussion page, accessed January 16, 2015).

A Danish government [report](#) in June 2014 estimated that 110 Danish citizens have traveled to fight with extremist groups in Iraq and Syria. In August 2014, a Danish citizen fighting with ISIS threatened Denmark, warning a Danish newspaper that "soon it [would] be Denmark's turn." ISIS sympathizers within Denmark have also declared support for ISIS. A number of such sympathizers are reported to attend the Grimhojvej mosque.

Denmark's most notable anti-extremism and anti-terrorism legislation can be found in its two Anti-Terror Packages from 2002 and 2006, respectively. The intelligence activities of the [Danish Security and Intelligence Service](#) (PET) and the [Danish Defense and Intelligence Service](#) (DDIS) work to identify violent-extremist and terrorist threats against Denmark and Danish interests abroad.

Danish authorities have also initiated various counter-extremism and de-radicalization programs. Most notably, the city of Aarhus launched a rehabilitation program for returning foreign fighters. Internationally, the Danish Armed Forces are participating in the U.S.-led coalition against ISIS.

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(Sources: [Local](#), [U.S. Department of State](#), [Institute for Strategic Dialogue](#), [Danish Security and Intelligence Services](#))

Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

Homegrown radicalization

The [largest threat](#) to Denmark comes from small groups of violent Islamist extremists inspired by al-Qaeda ideology and acting autonomously. [According](#) to the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET), “these individuals are capable of selecting targets, planning, financing and carrying out terrorist acts by themselves.”

Some domestic institutions are apparently contributing to the growth of radicalization in Denmark by disseminating violent extremist ideology and propaganda. For example, in September 2014, the Grimhojvej mosque in the Danish city of Aarhus openly declared support for ISIS. The mosque had been under investigation by Danish police since July 2014, when a video emerged of the mosque’s imam calling on God to “destroy the Zionist Jews.” The mosque has also reportedly become a haven for Danish jihadists. Twenty-two of the one hundred or so Danish foreign fighters who have gone to fight with ISIS had previously worshipped at Grimhojvej. (Sources: [The Local](#), [Newsweek](#))

Also in September 2014, a group known as De Humanitære Hjerter (“The Humanitarian Hearts”) took to selling stickers which read “Support our Ummah” written over ISIS’s logo. In response, Danish police raided four addresses and arrested two leaders of the group. (Source: [Newsweek](#))

Foreign Fighters

In 2012, Danish Muslims began volunteering to fight in Syria. The Center for Terror Analysis (CTA), a part of the Danish intelligence center PET, [estimated](#) in June 2014 that at least 110 Danish citizens traveled to Syria and Iraq to join the fighting.

Denmark has the second-highest number of foreign fighters in Syria per million of population, according to an August 2014 [report](#) by the *Economist*. According to PET, most of these extremists have joined ISIS and 15 have died. PET also warned that a “significant number” of Danes had acquired “specific military skills as a result of training and participation in combat operations” that could be used to carry out terror attacks within Denmark or on Danish interests abroad. (Source: [Al Jazeera](#))

In December 2013, the Center for Terror Analysis (CTA) [assessed](#) that foreign fighters from Denmark are predominately Sunni Muslim males aged 16-25 years. Foreign fighters come from various ethnic backgrounds, including Danish converts to Islam. [According to](#) the CTA, funds raised in Danish Islamic circles for Syrian humanitarian aid have apparently been used to finance foreign fighters’ travel to Syria.

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According to [recent testimony](#) from a Danish citizen fighting with ISIS, the terror group is plotting against Denmark. In an interview with periodical *Politiken*, the militant, identified only as “OA,” declared Denmark “high on ISIS’s list.” OA—who was back living in Denmark but planned to return to Syria—said that ISIS’s fight “is an open war... ISIS has said that all infidels should be battled. They should be eliminated and soon it will be Denmark’s turn.”

According to a 2014 report, a Danish national identified as Abu Sa’ad al Denmarki acted as a suicide bomber for ISIS. ISIS sources claim that Denmarki “mobilized from Denmark to the Islamic State, seeking martyrdom in the cause of Allah.” ISIS has previously claimed that Danish citizens have carried out suicide bombing missions for the terror group. (Source: [Long War Journal](#))

The U.S. State Department also [asserts](#) that a Danish citizen and former Guantanamo detainee named Slimane Hadj Abderrahmane, was killed fighting in Syria in February 2014. In March of the same year, Danish convert to Islam Kenneth Sorensen (aka Abdul Malik) was killed fighting in Syria.

History of Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

Jyllands-Posten

In 2005, the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published 12 cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, including one depicting Muhammad with a bomb in his turban. The cartoons, drawn by Kurt Vestergaard, launched what then–Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen called the country’s “biggest political crisis since World War II.” Mass protests erupted, and Danish embassies in Iran, Lebanon, and Syria were attacked in 2005 and 2006. In 2008, a car bomb exploded near the Danish embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, killing 6 and injuring 30. In 2010, al-Qaeda published an article titled “The Cartoon Crusade” in its recruitment magazine, *Inspire*, threatening attacks on Denmark and its interests abroad. The cartoons were re-printed in 2008, precipitating another onslaught of attacks targeting both Kurt Vertergaard and *Jyllands-Posten*. (Source: [Institute for Strategic Dialogue](#), [Newsweek](#))

Timeline of Notable Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

- February 14-15, 2015: One person was killed and three injured in an apparent assassination attempt of Swedish cartoonist Lars Vilks in Copenhagen. One person was killed and two injured in an attack on Copenhagen’s Grand Synagogue. The suspected perpetrator of both attacks was shot dead by police after he was tracked down using CCTV video surveillance. (Source: [BBC News](#))

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- September 2014: Danish police arrested two people connected to a charity suspected of selling stickers with ISIS's symbol. Suspects included a 35-year-old Libyan man, a 30-year-old Danish woman of Lebanese descent, and a 50-year-old Danish woman. (Source: [Local](#), [Al Akhbar English](#))
- August 2014: A brewing facility belonging to the Danish-owned Carlsberg beer brand was the target of a foiled ISIS attack in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. At least 19 Malaysians were arrested on terrorism related charges. (Source: [Local](#))
- 2007-2014: In December 2014, Said Mansour, a Moroccan-born Danish citizen known as "the Bookseller from Bronshou," was sentenced to four years in prison for supporting and inciting terrorism on social media. In 2007, Mansour was also sentenced to 3.5 years in prison for producing and distributing graphic videos that encouraged terrorism. The prosecution is pushing for Mansour to be deported back to Morocco after his latest arrest. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#), [Reuters](#))
- March 2013: In March, two brothers of Somali-Danish ancestry were handed 3.5-year sentences in Danish prison after they were found guilty of financing terrorism and undergoing terror training at an al-Shabab camp in Somalia. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))
- July 2013: A Danish High Court found ROJ TV and Mesopotamia Broadcasting guilty of receiving support from the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) and subsequently fined the companies \$860,000 USD for broadcasting terrorist-related materials from 2007-2010. ROJ TV consequently lost its license to broadcast in Denmark. Beginning in September 2013, 11 Danish citizens of Kurdish descent were tried for raising \$23 million for the PKK. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))
- September 2010: A letter bomb prepared by a 24-year-old Belgian national of Chechen descent inadvertently exploded in the Hotel Jørgensen in Copenhagen. The bomber intended to mail the explosive to the *Jyllands-Posten* newspaper. (Source: [Danish Intelligence and Security Services](#))
- October 2009: Two Islamic extremists were arrested for conspiring to commit acts of terrorism in Denmark, including against the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*. A joint investigation by the PET and the American FB determined that one of the suspects traveled to Denmark in 2009 to carry out reconnaissance and select targets for attacks. The arrested persons had also been in contact with militant terror groups including al-Qaeda, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and Harakat-ul-Jihad. (Source: [Danish Intelligence and Security Services](#))

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- 2009: Six people from the clothing manufacturer “Fighters + Lovers” were given suspended prison sentences after they were found guilty of financing terrorist groups FARC and PFLP through the sales of their products. One year later, the spokesperson from the organization “Association Uproar” was handed a suspended prison sentence for using campaign funds to finance the same groups. (Source: [Danish Security and Intelligence Services](#))
- 2008: Three Islamic extremists were arrested and detained for allegedly planning to kill cartoonist Kurt Westergaard for drawing controversial cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad. (Source: [Danish Intelligence and Security Services](#))
- September 2007: Eight people were arrested in Copenhagen on suspicion of connection to al-Qaeda. The suspects were charged with planning attacks and storing unstable explosives. Ranging in age between 19-29, six of the suspected terrorists were Danish nationals and two held Danish residency permits. (Source: [Danish Security and Intelligence Services](#))
- 2006: Four men including two Danish citizens were arrested for planning bomb attacks on Danish targets. In a house raid security services found metal shavings and a bottle of TATP, an explosive compound used in the 2005 London bombings. Mohammed Zaher, a 34-year old Palestinian, and Ahmad Khaldahi, a 22-year old Iraqi-citizen, were sentenced to 11 years in Danish prison. Khaldahi was subsequently deported. Abdallah Andersen, a Danish citizen, received a four-year sentence. (Sources: [Danish Security and Intelligence Services](#), [BBC News](#))

Domestic Counter-Extremism

Legislation

The backbone of Denmark’s current counterterrorism policies is composed of two anti-terrorism packages implemented in 2002 and 2006, respectively.

The 2002 “Anti-Terrorism Package I” amended the Danish penal code to criminalize the provision of financial and other support for terrorism. Among other measures it required telecommunication and Internet companies to log “individual data traffic” of “relevance to police interception” for at least one year. The measure implies logging the data traffic only—not the content—of an individual’s telecommunication activity (such as email.) This data is seen as necessary in investigating and prosecuting terrorists. (Sources: [Council of Europe](#), [Institute for Strategic Dialogue](#))

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“Anti-Terrorism Package II” was implemented in 2006 in the aftermath of the Madrid and London terror attacks. Anti-Terrorism Package II criminalized terrorist training activities and authorized greater intelligence sharing between PET and the Danish Military Intelligence Service. (Sources: [Council of Europe](#), [Institute for Strategic Dialogue](#))

Security Agencies

The intelligence activities of the [Danish Security and Intelligence Service](#) (PET) established the [Center for Terror Analysis](#) (CTA) in January 2007. The CTA is responsible for analyzing terror threats, and comprises staff from various Danish security agencies including DDIS, PET, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Danish Emergency Management Agency.

Government Programs

In 2005, the Danish government launched the [Action Plan for the Fight Against Terrorism](#), an initiative containing numerous programs including the cooperation of resources, investigation of terrorism, civic preparedness, dialogue with Muslim communities, and research.

The PET also hosts a quarterly [Dialogue Forum](#), to facilitate discussion and cooperation between PET and Denmark’s Muslim community to discuss various issues related to violent extremism. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#))

In 2007, Denmark’s second largest city, Aarhus, launched an initiative called “[Deradicalisation-Targeted Intervention](#)” aimed at identifying individuals at risk of extremist indoctrination. Denmark’s SSP cooperation, (school, social authorities, police), which was launched in the 1970s as a crime prevention initiative, has played an important role in shaping the intervention.

As part of the program social workers, teachers and community members notify the program about potential extremists, who are then invited by the police for an interview. According to Aarhus police officer Allan Aarslev, “if we invite people in a frank and direct way, they come.” Police and welfare workers then assess what can be done for the individual, considering options such as job training, a mentoring program or educational opportunities. (Source: [Globe and Mail](#))

Rehabilitation of Foreign Fighters

Since early 2014, Aarhus police and welfare services have run a rehabilitation program for returning foreign fighters known as the “exit program for radicalized citizens.” The initiative offers medical treatment for war wounds and psychological trauma. The program also assists returning fighters with finding work or resuming education. The initiative was launched after authorities in Aarhus discovered that approximately 31 people from the city left to fight in Syria since 2012. According to the most recent [data](#), only one Danish citizen left for Syria in 2014.

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Upon returning to Denmark, the returnees are screened by the police with help from the PET. None of the returnees have been arrested. According to Aarhus police officer Allan Aarslav, the police's "first priority is to make sure you're prosecuted when you get back. If you get back and want to get a grip on your old life, we can also help you to do that." As of September 2014, Danish authorities in Aarhus have been rehabilitating most of the 15 fighters that re-entered Denmark from Syria.

The program does not attempt to change the ideology of the extremists. According to rehabilitator Steffen Nielsen, "We don't spend a lot of energy fighting ideology. We don't try to take away your jihadist beliefs. You are welcome to dream of the Caliphate. But there are some means that you cannot use according to the penal code here. You can *be* al-Shabab all you like, as long as you don't actually *do* al-Shabab." (Sources: [Globe and Mail](#), [Newsweek](#), [New York Times](#), [International Business Times](#), [Washington Post](#), [Al Jazeera](#))

Prisons

In May 2011, the Danish Prison and Probation Service launched a 3-year project on deradicalization in prisons. The program, called "Back on Track," [aims](#) to deradicalize extremist inmates who may have adopted far-right, far-left, or religiously motivated extremist ideologies. As a contribution to the process, in 2013 PET released a handbook for prison officials on how to spot violent extremism among prisoners. (Sources: [Institute for Strategic Dialogue](#), [U.S. Department of State](#))

International counter-extremism

Foreign Military Engagements

Denmark has engaged militarily in foreign conflicts including the fight against ISIS, the French-led intervention of Mali, the war in Afghanistan, the war in Libya, and the war in Iraq.

ISIS

Denmark is a member of the U.S.-led coalition against ISIS and has reportedly pledged seven F-16 fighter jets, four operational planes, three reserve jets, and 250 pilots and support staff for a period of deployment lasting 12 months. According to Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt, "No one should be ducking in this case. Everyone should contribute." (Sources: [Newsweek](#), [Associated Press](#))

Mali

In January 2013, the Danish government sent a C-130 transport aircraft to [support](#) the French military intervention in Mali. In justifying the support, Danish Prime Minister Thorning-Schmidt stated, "[W]e have a clear interest in the international society helping the government in Mali

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dealing with the rebel groupings that are trying to take over the country with support from Islamist terrorist networks.” In February 2014, Denmark [pledged](#) limited personnel and air support to the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Mali.

Afghanistan

Between 2002 and 2013, 9,500 Danish troops were sent to Afghanistan to protect and train the Afghan military. The nearly 12-year operation cost the lives of 43 Danish soldiers. (Source: [Copenhagen Post](#))

Diplomatic and Financial Endeavors

The Danish government is a founding member of the 2011 [Global Counter Terrorism Forum](#) (GCTF), an international initiative designed to convene world leaders to strategize counter-terrorism policies.

In November 2011, the Danish government founded the “[Peace and Stabilisation Fund](#)” (PSF), which aims to [stabilize and rebuild](#) “fragile” countries, as well as counter the threat of violent extremism in those countries. Through the initiative, Denmark has contributed funding and personnel - with the interest of strengthening security- to numerous countries in the wider Horn of Africa/East Africa and the greater Afghanistan/Pakistan region.

From 2011-2014, the PSF funded the [DANIDA Assistance to Somalia](#) initiative to “make a contribution to a stable Somalia that can take care of its own security.” The program— which was allocated 300 million kroner (roughly \$46 million in current U.S. dollars)— also combatted “piracy and terrorist activities sponsored by Al-Shabaab and other insurgent groups.” DANIDA, and the PSF, [should be seen](#) in the broader context of the Denmark’s long-term effort to address radicalization and violent extremism in “fragile” countries.

Denmark is also a member of the [Financial Action Task Force](#), an intergovernmental organization that works to combat the financing of terrorism. The FATF has [recommended](#) the adoption of various measures including the criminalization of terrorist financing, the freezing of terrorist assets, and policies designed to ensure that terrorists cannot exploit non-governmental organizations. Denmark also cooperates closely and plays a coordinating role with other Nordic financial intelligence units (FIU). In September 2012, FIU representatives from various Nordic countries received training at PET’s Headquarters in Denmark.

In April 2013, Denmark and Burkina Faso [led](#) a workshop on countering violent extremism in West Africa and the Sahel in cooperation with the Global Counterterrorism Forum. Later in 2013, the Danish government allocated \$22 million to the [Peace and Stabilization Program for the Sahel](#), which [strategizes](#) “actionable ideas of intervention in the framework of the following three broader areas: Mediation & Reconciliation, Security Sector Reform, and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE).” (Source: [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#))