

The Netherlands: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

On March 18, 2019, a gunman opened fire on a tram in the Dutch city of Utrecht, killing at least three and wounding seven others. Police began searching the area after the attacker escaped. Authorities raised the terror threat level in the Utrecht province to its highest level amid the possibility of a “terrorist motive.” Police arrested the suspected gunman, Turkish-born Gokmen Tanis, after an eight-hour manhunt. Two others suspected of involvement were also arrested. (Sources: [Associated Press](#) [1], [Associated Press](#) [2], [Reuters](#) [3])

Overview

According to the Netherlands’s General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), Islamic extremism in the Netherlands has transformed from a “virtually invisible” phenomenon into an open and widespread one with several hundred supporters and thousands of sympathizers. The number of jihadist websites has increased exponentially since 2013 and jihadists are utilizing social media to recruit and organize. The AIVD fears that Dutch Muslim youth are at risk of being influenced into becoming fighters in Syria or participating in attacks on European soil. With the influx of refugees from the Middle East in 2015, radical Islamists and Salafists have increasingly targeted Muslim asylum seekers in their efforts to proselytize. (Sources: [AIVD](#) [4], [AIVD](#) [5], [Deutschlandfunk](#) [6], [University Leiden](#) [7], [AIVD](#) [8], [AIVD](#) [9])

The Netherlands’ threat level has remained at “substantial” since 2013 due to a “real chance of an attack,” according to the country’s National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV). As of March 2018, an estimated 300 Dutch citizens have traveled to Syria and Iraq, approximately 60 of whom have been killed. The Dutch government put the number of Dutch citizens currently fighting in Syria and Iraq at 160. The government has grown increasingly concerned about homegrown radicalized individuals and returning foreign fighters, currently estimated at approximately 50, who could carry out terror attacks in the Netherlands. In response, it passed a series of measures to counter homegrown radicalism and prevent Dutch citizens from becoming foreign fighters or from returning to the Netherlands after participating in jihad. In 2017, the government enacted tougher legislation restricting citizenship and passports of known terrorists and returnees. (Sources: [Library of Congress](#) [10], [U.S. Department of State](#) [11], [Dutch News](#) [12], [NCTV](#) [13], [Associated Press](#) [14], [NCTV](#) [15], [NCTV](#) [16], [AIVD](#) [5], [NCTV](#) [17])

According to the NCTV, in March 2018, far-right extremist violence was usually perpetrated by lone individuals or small groups. (Source: [NCTV](#) [17])

According to 2016 Pew Research Center polling, 77 percent of Dutch citizens support U.S.-led military action against ISIS, which 71 percent of Dutch citizens view as the top threat to the Netherlands. Conversely, 66 percent believed that relying too much on military force creates hatred that leads to more terrorism. The Pew poll demonstrates an increase from a 2014 CEP poll that found 61 percent of Dutch citizens believed Islamist extremist movements pose the greatest threat to Dutch national security. (Sources: [Pew Research Center](#) [18], [Pew Research Center](#) [19], [Counter Extremism Project](#) [20])

Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

Homegrown Radicalization

Islamic extremism has been spreading in the Netherlands since 2010, according to the AIVD’s October 2014 [report](#) [21] “The Transformation of Jihadism in the Netherlands.” It estimated that there were “several hundred core adherents” and “a few thousand” sympathizers of jihadist ideology in the country. The AIVD 2016 Annual [Report](#) [8] stated that “many hundreds of people” sympathize with al-Qaeda or ISIS, but are “unable or unwilling” to travel to Syria or Iraq. The AIVD credited this rise in part to tensions in the Dutch Muslim community stemming from increasing polarization between the Muslim and greater Dutch communities. The Dutch security agency believed these tensions help increase radicalization.

The proliferation of Salafi Islam’s message that “pure” Muslims must reject democratic values and modern Islamic practices has driven the jihadist movement in the Netherlands, according to the AIVD’s report. The AIVD identified three strands of Salafi Islam: apolitical, political, and jihadi. Apolitical and political Salafism rely primarily on non-violent proselytization, “*dawa*.” One such *dawa* group is known as Behind Bars/Street Dawah, which protested outside of foreign embassies to bring attention to Muslim detainees. Its youth meetings in The Hague drew dozens of attendees. The group

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has been inactive since 2012, which the AIVD linked to the first wave of Dutch foreign fighters to Syria that year. (Source: [AIVD](#) [21])

Jihadi Salafism emphasizes the necessity of violent jihad to achieve its Islamist ideals. The AIVD believes Salafism's extremist proselytization has resulted in an increase of jihadist sympathies. For example, Behind Bars/Street Dawah held a September 2012 protest of the film "Innocence of Muslims" during which participants chanted Osama bin Laden's name and waved jihadist banners. The AIVD is concerned about the jihadist movement's influence because of its call for violence, intolerance, and rejection of democratic values. (Source: [AIVD](#) [21])

In March 2018, the NCTV concluded that Dutch jihadists have shifted tactics—away from attempting to join ISIS abroad in favor of proselytizing and social activities inside the Netherlands. This change is likely due to a combination of ISIS's loss of territory in Iraq and Syria, as well as the Dutch authorities' efforts to interdict attempted foreign fighters from leaving the Netherlands. (Source: [NCTV](#) [17])

The AIVD report identified the Syrian civil war as the primary motivation of Dutch jihadists and attributed the spread of jihadism in the country to dawa groups and jihadists' use of social media and the Internet. In September 2013, for example, dozens of young people waved a jihadist flag during a soccer game and then posted pictures of the event on social media with messages supporting ISIS. The number of jihadist websites has increased exponentially since 2013, according to the AIVD. Jihadists also increasingly use social media to organize and recruit. (Source: [AIVD](#) [22])

The security agency's 2012 [report](#) [23] "Jihadism on the Web" found that jihadist forums on the Deep Web—the anonymous section of the Internet that has become a haven for drug dealers, pedophiles, and other criminals—have played a large role in the radicalization of Dutch Muslims. Extremists often start out on public Internet forums and social media and shift to the anonymity of more extremist- and jihadist-specific forums on the Deep Web as their knowledge and commitment grow. According to the 2017 AIVD report, however, the threat of cyberterrorism has been relatively small. Nonetheless, extremists have successfully carried out small-scale website defacements and denial-of-service attacks for propagandistic purposes. (Sources: [AIVD](#) [5], [NCTV](#) [24])

The 2010 AIVD [report](#) [25] "Local Jihadist Networks in the Netherlands" found that up until 2006, the jihadist threat to the Netherlands primarily emanated from domestic networks. A prominent example is the Hofstad Group, which was responsible for the 2004 murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh and failed plots against Dutch politicians in 2005. (Source: [New York Times](#) [26])

The AIVD found that Dutch jihadism shifted after 2006 from primarily homegrown networks to local offshoots of transnational networks. The 2010 report identified a growing local intent to support and participate in international jihadist activities. The AIVD credited government counter-extremism efforts, interpersonal disagreements between local groups, and a lack of local leadership within the local jihadist networks for this shift. Local radicalization primarily through the Internet has built support for international jihadist undertakings, but largely outside of the Netherlands. (Source: [AIVD](#) [25])

The AIVD 2012 annual report identified an increasing number of foreign fighters traveling to Syria and Iraq, including some who were recruited by local extremist networks like Sharia4Holland—a reported spin-off group of the banned British group al-Muhajiroun, cofounded by convicted [ISIS](#) [27] supporter Anjem Choudary that advocates for sharia law. This trend continued during 2013, increasing concerns about returning foreign fighters and their potential to radicalize others or carry out attacks inside the Netherlands. (Sources: [AIVD](#) [9], [AIVD](#) [28])

With the influx of refugees from the Middle East in 2015, radical Islamists and Salafists increasingly targeted Muslim asylum seekers in their efforts to proselytize. In 2016, the AIVD noted that radical Salafists tried to grow their networks by recruiting support from moderate Muslims, occasionally through intimidation and personal violence. (Sources: [Deutschlandfunk](#) [6], [University Leiden](#) [7], [AIVD](#) [8], [AIVD](#) [9])

Right-Wing Extremism

The extreme right has been motivated by anti-Islam and anti-immigrant sentiments, according to the AIVD 2018 annual report. Right-wing extremists have sought to promote "white racial purity," and blame politicians for implementing policies

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that they believe could result in *Umvolkung*, or the extinction of the white race. According to the March 2018 NCTV assessment, there were “no indications in the Netherlands of far-right terrorist structures or groups” and right-wing violence was relatively limited. Instances of far-right violence were often perpetrated by individuals or small groups. (Sources: [AIVD](#) [5], [NCTV](#) [17])

The Anne Frank House classifies right-wing extremist violence as racially or politically motivated attacks or attacks in which the suspect can be reasonably linked to right-wing extremism. The Anne Frank House also noted that the offenders may deny having a political motive and so motivations were inferred based on the context of the attacks. (Sources: [Anne Frank House](#) [29], [Anne Frank House](#) [30])

In a 2017 report, the Anne Frank House identified 4,038 anti-Semitic or racist incidents occurring in 2016. Anti-Semitic insults and assaults specifically directed against Jewish people as well as vandalism of Jewish locations have decreased in comparison to its former peak in 2014. On the other hand, untargeted anti-Semitic verbal abuse saw a significant increase (80 percent) from 2015 to 2016. Discrimination against Muslims had previously increased in 2015—likely attributed to social tensions caused by Islamist-inspired terrorist attacks and the influx of refugees—but dropped by 22 percent in 2016. (Source: [Anne Frank House](#) [31])

Nonetheless, the first half of 2016 was characterized by violent and non-violent protests against the arrival and resettlement of refugees. For instance, formed in 2014 as an offshoot of the German anti-Islam group Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident (Pegida), Pegida Netherlands held several anti-Islam protests around the Netherlands, some of which devolved into violent clashes with counter-protesters. The group officially maintains a non-violent stance that allows it to continue protesting across the country. (Sources: [Anne Frank House](#) [31], [NL Times](#) [32], [NL Times](#) [33], [NCTV](#) [34])

In November 2015, police arrested six people during an anti-refugee demonstration in the Dutch municipality of Enschede, near the German border. The six reportedly performed Nazi salutes and became physically violent. Later that month, also near Enschede, 12 pig heads were left on a field designated for an asylum seeker reception center. On February 27, 2015, a 33-year-old Dutch man was arrested for throwing a Molotov cocktail at an Enschede mosque with dozens of people inside. According to police, the man had terrorist intentions because he wanted to frighten people. (Source: [Dutch News](#) [35])

In July 2016, a Dutch chapter of the Finnish anti-immigrant group Soldiers of Odin launched in the Netherlands. Soldiers of Odin blames “Islamist intruders” for increasing crime rates and has self-proclaimed street patrols in Finland. Dutch authorities have investigated the local offshoot after accusations of assault after members posted on the group’s Facebook page to hunt down an asylum seeker accused of assaulting women. (Sources: [NCTV](#) [36], [Reuters](#) [37], [Reuters](#) [38])

Right-Wing Political Extremism

During the March 15, 2017, parliamentary elections, Dutch voters reelected Prime Minister Mark Rutte, who faced a challenge from far-right parliamentarian Geert Wilders, head of the Party for Freedom (PVV). Rutte’s center-right People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy won 33 seats in the country’s 150-seat parliament. Wilders and the PVV came in second place with 20 seats. Wilders is known for extreme anti-Muslim views and has compared the Quran to Hitler’s “Mein Kampf,” and said, “I don’t hate Muslims, I hate Islam.” He produced the 2008 movie *Fitna*, which denounced Islam as an evil ideology. A Dutch court acquitted Wilders of hate speech in June 2011 under the protection of free speech. On December 9, 2016, a Dutch judge convicted Wilders of inciting discrimination and insulting a group because of comments he made at a March 2014 political rally calling for fewer Moroccan immigrants. The judicial panel declined to sentence Wilders, declaring that a conviction was punishment enough. The court also rejected a charge of inciting hatred. (Sources: [NPR](#) [39], [New York Times](#) [40], [Guardian](#) [41], [Wall Street Journal](#) [42], [New York Times](#) [43])

The PVV previously won 24 seats in 2010 elections, but lost nine seats in the 2012 elections. Wilders likens himself to Theo van Gogh and the late far-right Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn while disassociating himself from other far-right European leaders such as Marine Le Pen of France’s National Front. Wilders praises the Netherlands’s freedom of expression and believes “Islamization” threatens Dutch tolerance. (Sources: [Dutch News](#) [44], [BBC News](#) [45])

Wilders has claimed inspiration from the late far-right Fortuyn, who led the Pim Fortuyn List in the Netherlands’s 2002

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national elections. Fortuyn had espoused anti-Islamic and anti-immigrant platforms, calling Islam a “backwards culture.” He believed Muslim immigrants posed a threat to Dutch national rights and equality. The Pim Fortuyn List had been expected to win enough of the vote in the 2002 election to be a major force in Dutch coalition politics, but Volkert van der Graaf shot and killed Fortuyn a week before the elections in May 2002. Graaf said he killed Fortuyn to protect Muslims. (Sources: [Dutchnews.nl](#) [46], [New York Times](#) [47], [Telegraph](#) [48])

Left-Wing Extremism

According to the NCTV’s July 2016 terrorist threat assessment, the likelihood of left-wing violence has increased since 2015. The NCTV reported that left-wing extremists in the Netherlands have protested against the detention and expulsion of asylum-seekers, as well as of companies involved in building detention centers. According to the NCTV, protesters have refrained from “serious acts of physical violence,” but it is “conceivable that these activities could become more serious.” (Source: [NCTV](#) [34])

Left-wing extremists have also targeted demonstrations by right-wing extremist groups Pegida Nederland and the Nederlandse Volks-Unie (the Dutch People’s Union). In these cases, the NCTV reports that left-wing extremists have employed violence in their protests. According to the NCTV, “Using violence against individuals is not a common tactic for the far left, but violence against right-wing extremists is an exception to this rule.” Violent clashes between extreme-right and extreme-left protesters is increasingly common, the NCTV said in its November 2016 report. (Sources: [NCTV](#) [34], [NCTV](#) [36])

The NCTV 2018 report concluded that far-left protests and demonstrations were very limited. However, authorities remain concerned about the possibility of intimidating and unlawful acts, vandalism directed against politicians, and online threats. According to AIVD 2018 report, some Dutch left-wing extremists participated in the violent riots during the G20 Summit in Hamburg, Germany, in July 2017. In order to obstruct the course of the summit, left-wing extremists threw rocks and Molotov cocktails, caused fires, and looted shops. Police forces responded with water cannons and teargas. (Sources: [Deutsches Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz](#) [49], [CNN](#) [50], [Focus](#) [51], [AIVD](#) [5], [NCTV](#) [34])

The NCTV is also concerned by far-left anarchists and anti-fascist groups protesting what they consider “racist police violence.” In its November 2016 report, the NCTV noted an increase in messaging online and in the streets—particularly in The Hague—to rise up against the police. (Source: [NCTV](#) [36])

In July 2016, Dutch authorities began suspecting that three members of the German left-wing extremist group Rote Armee Fraktion were hiding in the Netherlands. In June 2017, new evidence emerged supporting suspicions that the group, responsible for six violent robberies in Germany, were still somewhere in the country. (Source: [NL Times](#) [52])

Foreign Fighters

Between January 2017 and July 2018, the Dutch government added 59 names to the country’s national terrorism list, bringing the total to 139 designations. Foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria largely comprise the list of 104 men, 32 women, and three organizations. As of March 2018, at least 300 Dutch citizens have traveled to Syria and Iraq to become foreign fighters since 2012. Of those, approximately 160 are currently fighting, about 50 have returned to the Netherlands, an estimated 60 have died in Syria and Iraq, and about 30 remain in the region living in refugee camps or in detention. Dutch authorities worry that the more than 145 children of Dutch foreign fighters growing up in ISIS-held territory may pose a future risk to the country. Less than a third of them were forcibly moved there by one or both parents, whereas the majority was born in Syria and Iraq. Most of them are under the age of four. According to AIVD, boys in ISIS territory as young as 9 are trained in weaponry and brainwashed with extremist jihadi ideologies. (Sources: [NL Times](#) [53], [NL Times](#) [54], [AIVD](#) [55], [NCTV](#) [17], [AIVD](#) [5], [Government of the Netherlands](#) [56])

According to an April 2016 International Center for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) report, the majority of Dutch jihadist foreign fighters “are male and under the age of 25 [...] have lower or lower-middle class socio-economic backgrounds, low-to-medium levels of education and limited chances on the labour market.” They were raised in both traditional immigrant households “as well as in ethnically Dutch settings” and many have a history of petty crime and drug abuse. A 2015 study based on police internal data shows that about 60 percent of foreign fighters have psychosocial problems, and approximately 43 percent are diagnosed with behavioral problems. Nearly 6 percent suffer from personality disorder or

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mental illness indicating that mental health problems are more common in jihadists than in the general public. A 2017 ICCT report verifies this trend, stating that “mental health problems can serve as a catalyst to radicalisation and to the decision to become a foreign fighter.” (Sources: [ICCT](#) [57], [Perspectives on Terrorism](#) [58], [ICCT](#) [59])

A small number of Dutch have joined anti-ISIS forces in northern Syria. According to a Dutch intelligence member, “probably a few dozen” Dutch citizens have traveled to Syria to fight alongside Kurdish forces. (Source: [NL Times](#) [60])

The Dutch NCTV reported in July 2016 that the number of Dutch citizens traveling to conflict zones has steadily declined since the beginning of 2016 and Dutch jihadist networks have maintained a low profile since late 2015. This trend was reiterated in the AIVD 2016 Annual [Report](#) [8], which was released in April 2017. The NCTV believes that returning jihadists pose a long-term threat to the Netherlands. As ISIS is determined to carry out attacks in Western Europe, particularly as it loses territory in Iraq and Syria, returning jihadists may form or join new transnational networks to facilitate and coordinate activities. NCTV’s terrorism threat assessment of March 2018 concluded that ISIS will increasingly rely on individuals already residing inside the Netherlands to carry out attacks. Authorities believe that ISIS will most likely try to exploit existing networks, for instance, through family members and friends of ISIS foreign fighters. (Sources: [NCTV](#) [34], [AIVD](#) [55], [Associated Press](#) [14], [Government of the Netherlands](#) [61], [NCTV](#) [36], [NCTV](#) [17])

In late March 2016, Turkish officials revealed that they had previously arrested Brahim el-Bakraoui, one of the suicide bombers in the Brussels terrorist attack on March 22, 2016. Turkey had arrested el-Bakraoui in June 2015 at the Turkish-Syrian border on charges of being a foreign fighter. Turkey deported him to the Netherlands that July. A Dutch court later released el-Bakraoui citing a lack of evidence connecting him to terrorism. El-Bakraoui returned to Belgium after his release. (Sources: [Associated Press](#) [62], [Newsweek](#) [63])

In December 2014, Saudi cleric Abdullah al-Muhaysini called on Dutch Muslims to join the fight/ in Syria with the Nusra Front or other jihadist groups. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad told Dutch media that European governments bear responsibility for foreign fighters in Syria. He accused European countries of failing to integrate extremists. “If you live in a ghetto, you become an extremist,” he said. (Sources: [NL Times](#) [64], [NL Times](#) [65])

The NCTV reported in March 2018 that at least 145 minors with a connection to the Netherlands currently live in ISIS-held territory. About one third were forcibly moved there by one or both parents. Dutch prosecutors announced in March 2015 that a divorced Chechen mother took her two young children with her to Syria to join ISIS without their Dutch father’s consent. It was the first recorded case in the Netherlands of one parent taking children to Syria without the other parent’s knowledge. The NCTV has admitted that the challenge of gauging travelers’ intentions makes it difficult to stop would-be jihadists from leaving the country. (Sources: [NCTV](#) [66], [Dutch News](#) [67], [Dutch News](#) [68], [Guardian](#) [69], [NCTV](#) [17], [AIVD](#) [5])

Some former Dutch soldiers have taken up arms in Syria. The Dutch Defense Ministry reported in September 2015 that a missing airman had left for Syria. The 28-year-old Royal Air Force sergeant likely went to join ISIS, according to the ministry. (Source: [CNN](#) [70])

A former Royal Netherlands Army soldier, identified as Israfil Yilmaz, left the Dutch army to join ISIS in its fight against Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. He claimed that he was disappointed in Western efforts to stop the dictator’s onslaught against protesters. Photos of Yilmaz in Syria appeared on Instagram and Tumblr where he maintained an active social media presence. Yilmaz trained other English-speaking foreign fighters in Syria. He admitted to training British suicide bomber Abu Sulayman al-Britani, who drove an explosives-laden truck through the gates of Syria’s prison in Aleppo in November 2014. Al-Britani is suspected to have been a member of the Nusra Front. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [71], [Mirror](#) [72], [Independent](#) [73], [Daily Mail](#) [74])

Yilmaz dismissed the idea that foreign fighters would return to their countries of origin to carry out terrorism. He called the Netherlands a “closed chapter” and said he and others like him came to Syria “to die.” Yilmaz was likely killed in a bombing raid on the ISIS stronghold of Raqqa, Syria in September 2016. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [71], [Mirror](#) [72], [Independent](#) [73], [Daily Mail](#) [74])

A 19-year-old Dutch Muslim convert identified only as Aicha had gone to Syria in February 2014 to marry Yilmaz, whom she had seen interviewed on TV. Her mother reportedly met her at the Turkish-Syria border to bring her home after her marriage failed. Police arrested Aicha in November 2014 when she arrived back in the Netherlands with her mother and

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charged her with joining ISIS. A Dutch court ordered her conditional release later in the month. The court did not publicly disclose those conditions. (Sources: [News 24](#) [75], [BBC News](#) [76], [Guardian](#) [77])

ISIS reportedly executed eight Dutch jihadis in late February 2016 for attempting to desert the terror group, according to the citizen journalist group [Raagga is Being Slaughtered Silently](#) [78]. The eight were part of a cell of 75 Dutch and Dutch-Moroccan ISIS fighters. However, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and other media sources claim the event never took place. (Sources: [Fox News](#) [79], [Daily Beast](#) [80])

The conflicts in Syria and Iraq are not the first to draw Dutch citizens to travel abroad to fight jihad. Dutch Muslims have sporadically tried to join jihadist activities abroad in such places as Yemen, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Chechnya since 2001. Since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, the Dutch government has grown increasingly concerned with the number of Dutch citizens traveling to the Middle East to fight for ISIS, al-Qaeda, and other groups. The AIVD is also concerned that would-be foreign fighters stopped from leaving the country will pose a domestic threat out of anger at the Dutch government. (Sources: [AIVD](#) [81], [Kronos](#) [82], [New York Times](#) [83], [Dutch News](#) [84], [Dutch News](#) [12], [NL Times](#) [64], [NCTV](#) [66], [NL Times](#) [85])

Dutch Suicide Bombers

On January 28, 2016, Abu Hanifa al-Hulandi reportedly carried out a suicide bombing in Aden, Yemen. The Dutch bomber targeted the home of Yemen's president Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, killing 10 and injuring 20. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack, but the Dutch National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security could not confirm if Hulandi was the perpetrator, as another Dutch national by the same moniker had died in Syria in October 2015. (Source: [NL Times](#) [85])

On February 21, 2015, two Dutch-Somali nationals killed 25 people in twin suicide bombings at the Central Hotel in Mogadishu, Somalia. Two members of parliament, the deputy mayor of Mogadishu, and the prime minister's chief of staff were among the dead, while Deputy Prime Minister Mohamed Arte was one of dozens wounded. The Somali National Intelligence and Security Agency identified the bombers as Dutch-Somali nationals Ismail Muse and Lula Ahmed Dahir. Dahir had worked part-time at the hotel for up to four months, according to the Somali National Intelligence and Security Agency. Muse detonated a car bomb parked at the hotel, while Dahir wore an explosive vest to the hotel's prayer room. Al-Shabab claimed responsibility for the attack. (Sources: [Agence France-Presse](#) [86], [Dutch News](#) [87])

At least three other Dutch nationals have become suicide bombers in the Middle East as of 2014. The NCTV said a suicide bomber blew up a Baghdad police station on November 12, 2014, killing more than 20 officers. An online ISIS statement named the bomber as Abu Abdullah al-Hollandi. A video surfaced in December confirming al-Hollandi was 19-year-old Sultan Berzel, who had traveled to Syria that September with his 19-year-old friend Rezkan. Rezkan reportedly died in December after he was wounded in fighting in Syria. (Sources: [Daily Star](#) [88], [NL Times](#) [89])

Response to Foreign Fighters

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said during a televised debate on March 5, 2015, that Dutch citizens traveling to Iraq and Syria "go there to commit the most horrible attacks, to learn how to build bombs, how to take away a lot of lives" and then return home to carry out domestic attacks. He said he would prefer to stop foreign fighters from leaving, but would rather see them die abroad than return home. Rutte's statement sparked a media controversy and he later defended his position by saying that the "only aim" of Dutch citizens who go to fight in Syria "is to kill as many people as possible." Laura Huisman, spokeswoman for Rutte's People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, said afterward that it is a "logical consequence" of the fight against ISIS that Dutch jihadists "do get in the way of our lethal weapons [...] The Netherlands is a safer and better place without them." (Sources: [Newsweek](#) [90], [Dutch News](#) [91], [NL Times](#) [92])

Authorities have sought to prevent Dutch jihadists from leaving by targeting recruiters. For example, on December 10, 2015, a Dutch court sentenced nine members of a jihadist network accused of recruiting young Dutch citizens to fight in Iraq and Syria alongside ISIS and other groups. The court acquitted ringleader Azzedine C., a.k.a. Abou Moussa, of recruitment charges, but sentenced him to six years in prison for hate speech and incitement. One of the convicted, Hicham El O., had recently returned from fighting in Syria. He received a five-year sentence. Two of the convicted are believed to still be in Syria and were tried in absentia. The individuals operated a network in an impoverished neighborhood of The Hague. According to presiding Judge Rene Elkerbout, the network contributed to "a climate in which

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youngsters felt called upon to go to Syria and fight.” Oussama C., the group’s 19-year-old cleric, had himself [attempted](#) [93] to travel to Syria, but his plan was thwarted when his mother took away his passport. The trial was the largest jihad trial to date in the Netherlands. (Sources: [NL Times](#) [94], [BBC News](#) [95], [Associated Press](#) [14], [Teun Van Dongen](#) [93])

In October 2015, Bulgarian authorities arrested three Dutch citizens, ages 17 to 22, suspected of planning to join ISIS. The three were arrested trying to cross the border into Turkey. Dutch authorities issued an international arrest warrant for the 18-year-old after he was reported missing. (Source: [NL Times](#) [96])

Authorities arrested an 18-year-old Syrian man in The Hague in late November 2015 on suspicion of participation in a terrorist organization. The man had sought asylum in the Netherlands in October and lived in an asylum shelter in Zaandam. He reportedly told other asylum seekers that he is a fighter for al-Qaeda and ISIS. Dutch prosecutors said there is no evidence that he had planned an attack in the Netherlands. (Source: [NL Times](#) [97])

In April 2018, Dutch rapper Marouane Boulahhyani was sentenced to six years in jail in absentia for traveling to Syria and joining ISIS in 2013. Boulahhyani allegedly turned himself in to a Dutch embassy in 2017 and was later falsely reported dead. The Dutch government believes that he currently resides in Syria actively participating in armed battles for ISIS. (Source: [Expatica](#) [98])

The increase in Dutch foreign fighters has raised concerns that foreign fighters would receive training abroad and return to the Netherlands to carry out terrorist attacks within the country. In January 2014, the government revoked the passports of eight would-be foreign fighters who had tried to travel to Syria. That June, the Netherlands gave Turkey a list of 100 names of people suspected of trying to travel to Syria from the Netherlands to fight for ISIS or another jihadist group in the Syrian civil war. By December 2014, the government was monitoring 33 individuals who had returned from Syria. A group of Dutch fighters in Syria warned a Dutch newspaper in late 2014 that if the government revokes their passports, they will target the Netherlands. (Sources: [Dutch News](#) [99], [NL Times](#) [100], [NL Times](#) [101])

The Hague’s mayor, Jozias van Aartsen, has called on the Dutch national government to establish psychological treatment programs for returning foreign fighters to evaluate their potential threat. The government announced plans in November 2014 to create a special support unit for the families of foreign fighters. (Sources: [Dutch News](#) [67], [Dutch News](#) [12])

The Dutch government has removed restrictions on some foreign fighters depending on whom they are fighting against. At least three members of the Dutch motorcycle gang No Surrender have joined Kurdish forces fighting against ISIS in Iraq. According to Public Prosecutor spokesman Wim de Bruin, “Joining a foreign armed force was previously punishable, now it’s no longer forbidden. You just can’t join a fight against the Netherlands.” He also said Dutch citizens would be liable if they engaged in illegal acts such as murder or rape. The European Union in September 2014 allowed individual EU governments to arm Iraqi Kurdish fighters. Dutch citizens are still barred from fighting alongside the Kurdish group PKK because it is labeled a terrorist group. (Sources: [Agence France-Presse](#) [102], [Foreign Policy](#) [103], [Reuters](#) [104])

Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

Following the December 2016 terror attack on a Berlin Christmas market, the Dutch government kept the Netherlands’s terrorism threat level steady at the second highest level of four, indicating a high potential for an attack in the Netherlands, but there are no specific indications that an attack is planned. The Netherlands has not been the target of a major terrorist attack on the scale of Paris or Brussels, but the country has nonetheless been host to extremist activity. (Sources: [Dutch News](#) [105], [NCTV](#) [34])

The Hofstad Group

The Hofstad Group was a network composed largely of young Muslim Dutch immigrants that emerged between 2002 and 2003. The government linked the group to networks in Spain and Belgium and believed several members had received training in Pakistan. Most of the group’s members were arrested after the 2004 murder of filmmaker Theo van Gogh. (Sources: [China Daily](#) [106], [Washington Post](#) [107])

Dutch forces raided an apartment in The Hague on November 10, 2004, resulting in the arrest of two members, 19-year-

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old Jason Walters and 22-year-old Ismail Akhnikh. Walters, the son of an American soldier and a Dutch woman, had converted to Islam at age 16. His town's mosque banned him after he began increasingly speaking about waging jihad against non-believers. According to police, Walters had planned to assassinate right-wing Dutch Members of Parliament Geert Wilders and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Walters wounded three officers when he threw a hand grenade into the street during the arrest raid. A court sentenced him to 15 years in prison in 2006. (Source: [Washington Post](#) [107])

A series of raids in The Hague, Amsterdam, Leiden, and Almere in October 2005 resulted in the arrest of Samir Azzouz and six other members of the Hofstad Group conspiring to attack the Dutch Parliament and intelligence service headquarters, and assassinate several politicians. In his December 21, 2005, testimony, Azzouz told the court, "We reject you. We reject your system. We hate you. I guess that about sums it up." (Sources: [NCTV](#) [108], [New York Times](#) [26])

Police began surveilling then 17-year-old Azzouz, a Dutch national of Moroccan decent, in early 2003 after he was stopped at the Ukrainian border trying to join Islamic militants in Chechnya. Authorities arrested him and other Hofstad members that October for allegedly planning a violent attack, but released them because of a lack of evidence. Azzouz was arrested again in June 2004 for armed robbery of a supermarket. Police found detonators and other bomb-making materials after searching his home. They also found drawings of Dutch political and civilian infrastructure sites such as Amsterdam's airport, the Ministry of Defense, and the Parliament. Prosecutors had records of Azzouz vowing in online conversations to kill non-Muslims and supporting the replacement of the Dutch government with an Islamic system. He was convicted only on weapons possession charges. An appeals court ruled that Azzouz's terrorist preparations were "so clumsy and primitive" that they did not constitute a concrete threat.

Azzouz received a nine-year sentence in 2008 for membership in the Hofstad Group, plotting attacks on political targets, and recruiting people to the armed struggle against "the enemies of Islam." He was released in September 2013 on prison leave to complete a business degree. He reportedly wants to move to the United Arab Emirates but he is forbidden from leaving the country.

(Sources: [China Daily](#) [106], [New York Times](#) [109], [Dutch News](#) [110], [Dutch News](#) [111])

Murder of Theo van Gogh

Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh had received death threats after his film *Submission* had aired on Dutch television. The film explored violence against women in Islamic societies. Mohammed Bouyeri, a 26-year-old Dutch-Moroccan citizen, interpreted the film as an insult to Islam. He shot van Gogh and slit his throat in Amsterdam on November 2, 2004. Bouyeri used a knife to pin a note to van Gogh's chest threatening Somali-born Dutch Member of Parliament Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who had frequently criticized Islamic practices. Bouyeri said during his trial that Islamic law compelled him to chop off the head of anyone who insults Allah or the prophet. Bouyeri received a life sentence in July 2005.

According to Dutch authorities, Bouyeri had previously worked to counter extremism among Dutch Muslims, but radicalized under the influence of a Syrian-born militant known as Abu Khatib. Bouyeri had also belonged to the Hofstad Group and his conviction sparked the November 2004 raids against the group.

(Sources: [BBC News](#) [112], [BBC News](#) [113], [Washington Post](#) [114])

- **March 18, 2019:** A gunman opens fire on a tram in the Dutch city of Utrecht, killing at least three and wounding nine others. Police begin searching the area after the attacker escapes. Authorities raise the terror threat level in the Utrecht province to its highest level amid the possibility of a "terrorist motive." Police release a photo of Turkish-born Gokmen Tanis, who they say is "associated with the incident." Sources: [Associated Press](#) [2], [Reuters](#) [3]
- **September 28, 2018:** Police arrest seven men, between ages 21 and 34, who are suspected of planning a multisite terrorist attack involving guns, grenades, and explosives. According to Dutch authorities, police has foiled "very advanced plans," seizing a significant amount of precursor material for improvised explosive devices. Sources: [New York Times](#) [115], [BBC News](#) [115]
- **August 31, 2018:** Jawed S., a 19-year-old Afghan refugee with a resident permit in Germany, stabs and seriously injures two U.S. tourists at Central Station in Amsterdam. The assailant tries to escape, but police shoot and arrest him. Dutch authorities believe the attacker had a "terrorist motive." Sources: [Stern](#) [116], [BBC News](#) [117], [Washington Post](#) [118]
- **August 30, 2018:** Police arrest a 26-year-old Pakistani man in The Hague, who is "suspected of committing a terrorist

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act, planning to commit murder and incitement.”

The man had posted a YouTube video saying that he planned to attack far-right politician Geert Wilders or the Dutch parliament. Source: [The News](#) [119]

- **August 17, 2018:**Police arrest a far-right extremist for making threats on Facebook after PVV party member Willie Dillie commits suicide.
The man, who is from the Dutch town of Schiedam, writes on Facebook: “If this does not have drastic consequences, then I will launch an attack. And I am really serious about this. If the state does nothing, my fate is sealed.” Sources: [Dutch News](#) [120], [NL Times](#) [121]
- **August 6, 2018:**City councilor and PVV party member Willie Dillie posts a video on Facebook in which she claims she was kidnapped and gang-raped by Muslims in 2017 as part of an intimidation campaign.
She accuses former PVV party member Arnoud van Doorn, who is a convert to Islam, to be behind the attack. She commits suicide on August 8. Sources: [Reuters](#) [122], [Dutch News](#) [123]
- **July 30, 2018:**A car runs down a group of touring cyclists in Tajikistan.
The car’s occupants then exit the vehicle to stab and shoot at the group. The attack leaves four dead, including a Dutch couple, and three injured. The Tajik government believes that that the banned group Islamic Resistance Party is behind the attack. ISIS claims responsibility. Sources: [NL Times](#) [124], [NL Times](#) [125], [U.S. News](#) [126]
- **May 23, 2018:**Police arrest a 43-year-old man from Gelderland on suspicion of preparing a violent crime with a terrorist intent aimed against Muslims.
Source: [NL Times](#) [127]
- **April 17, 2018:**Police arrest four Dutch-Moroccan men suspected for planning a terrorist attack on the Turkish consulate in Rotterdam.
Source: [NL Times](#) [128]
- **April 4, 2018:**A Dutch rapper, identified as Marouane Boulahhyani, is sentenced to six years in jail in absentia for traveling to Syria and joining ISIS in 2013.
Reports about his death are later proven wrong. The Dutch government believes that he still resides in Syria actively participating in armed battles for ISIS. Source: [Expatica](#) [98]
- **September 13, 2017:**The Netherlands revoke the Dutch citizenship of four foreign fighters in absentia.
This marked the first time the government used the new legislation that entered into law March 1. Sources: [NL Times](#) [129], [U.S. Department of State](#) [11]
- **August 23, 2017:**A rock concert in Rotterdam is canceled after authorities receive information about a possible attack.
Hours later, the police arrest a man identified only as Jimmy F., but the charges of terrorism are later dropped due to lack of evidence. Source: [NL Times](#) [130]
- **July 26, 2017:**Suriname police arrest two Dutch-Surinamese brothers suspected of plotting a terror attack against the United States ambassador there.
Source: [NL Times](#) [131]
- **July 12, 2017:**A pro-ISIS telegram channel publishes a statement calling for a terror attack on a football match in Utrecht on July 19. No attack occurs.
Source: [NL Times](#) [132]
- **June 27, 2017:**Dutch authorities arrest an 18-year-old woman on “terrorism suspicions.”
She had previously been arrested on connections to terrorism when she was 17, but was released without a sentencing. Source: [NL Times](#) [133]
- **June 23, 2017:**Police in Brunssum arrest a 38-year-old Syrian man “on allegations of involvement in a terrorist act.”
No weapons or explosives were found in the home of the asylum seeker who arrived in the Netherlands in 2014. Source: [NL Times](#) [134]
- **June 22, 2017:**Dutch authorities arrest a 28-year-old man in connection to an ongoing terrorism investigation, although “he is not currently suspected committing or preparing for a terrorist action.”
Source: [NL Times](#) [135]
- **June 15, 2017:**Authorities in Utrecht arrest an 18-year-old suspected of spreading ISIS propaganda, as well as instructing others on how to make explosives.
Source: [NL Times](#) [136]
- **June 9, 2017:**Dutch authorities arrest a 29-year-old while he films outside the Philips Stadium in southern Eindhoven. Authorities were monitoring the man for “possibly being radicalized.” Source: [The Malaysian Insight](#) [137]
- **May 23, 2017:**Police arrest Aweys Shikhey, Dutch national of Somali descent, at London Stansted Airport before boarding a flight to Istanbul to join ISIS.
Shikhey previously spoke about attacking fans of the soccer team, Tottenham Hotspurs, and the Queen of England. In February 2018, he is convicted of preparing for acts of terrorism by a British court. Source: [Daily Mail](#) [138]
- **May 2, 2017:**Dutch authorities arrest two Dutch-Somali men, aged 22 and 21, following intelligence from AIVD.
While the 21-year-old was released the following day, the 22-year-old has been accused of belonging to the terrorist organization al-Shabab. Source: [NL Times](#) [139]
- **April 9, 2017:**Dutch authorities temporarily detain 34-year-old Mounir E. during the Rotterdam Marathon.
Authorities suspect Mounir E. was planning an attack after co-workers heard him say “something beautiful will happen

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at the marathon: boom!” This marks one of the first uses of the new counterterrorism legislation that allows authorities to temporarily ban suspected terrorists from public areas before a criminal act has been committed. Source: [NL Times](#) [140]

- **December 7, 2016:**Dutch authorities in Rotterdam detain a 30-year-old Dutch national, Jaouad A., who is “suspected of preparing a terrorist crime,” according to Dutch prosecutors. Detectives searching the suspect’s apartment find an AK-47 rifle, four boxes of illegal highly explosive fireworks, and a painting of the ISIS flag. They also discover several mobile phones and 1,600 euros in cash. A tip from the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service prompted the raid. In November 2017, Jaouad A. receives a sentence for four years in prison. Sources: [Associated Press](#) [141], [Reuters](#) [142], [U.S. Department of State](#) [143], [Dutch News](#) [144], [NL Times](#) [145]
- **July 23, 2016:**A Dutch woman, Laura Hansen, appears on Kurdish television, saying she has escaped from ISIS with help from the Peshmerga. Hansen claims that her husband forced her and her children to travel to the Middle East. Upon her return to the Netherlands, the Dutch police interviews her and places her under arrest. In November 2017, Hansen is convicted for supporting terrorist acts and sentenced to two years’ imprisonment. Sources: [Seattle Times](#) [146], [U.S. Department of State](#) [143]
- **April 2016:**Police arrest members of an alleged terrorist cell in Roosendaal for planning an attack in Amsterdam. One man is an Egyptian national, who reportedly fought for a terrorist organization and has entered the Netherlands with a fake Syrian passport. Another man, a Dutch café manager, is later released. Sources: [NL Times](#) [147], [NL Times](#) [148]
- **March 27, 2016:**Dutch police in Rotterdam arrest a 32-year-old French citizen after a request by French police. The suspect is allegedly connected to Reda Kriket, who had been arrested three days earlier in France on suspicion of plotting a terror attack there. Dutch police planned to hand the suspect over to French authorities. Source: [CNN](#) [149]
- **February 27, 2016:**Five right-wing extremists throw Molotov cocktails at a local mosque in Enschede while people are inside. A passerby extinguishes the fire before anyone is injured. In October 2016, a court convicts the men of arson with terrorist intent and sentences each to four years in prison. The case is the first instance in which prosecutors used terrorism statutes to charge perpetrators for a right-wing terrorist attack. Sources: [NL Times](#) [150], [U.S. Department of State](#) [143]
- **January 22, 2016:**Two bombs and a shooting rampage at a beach restaurant in Mogadishu, Somalia, leaves 19 people dead and several more wounded. Al-Shabab claims responsibility. Ismail Muse Ahmed Guled, a Somali man with a Dutch passport, is allegedly the mastermind behind the attack. Guled is arrested at the Mogadishu airport. Source: [NL Times](#) [151]
- **December 10, 2015:**A Dutch court convicts nine Dutch citizens of hate speech and terrorism-related charges, making it the largest terrorism trial in the Netherlands. Members of the cell were arrested a year prior. Sources: [NL Times](#) [152], [BBC News](#) [95]
- **September 2015:**A few days before Budget Day, when the government announces its plans for the coming year, Dutch secret services AIVD and MIVD reportedly foil a possible terrorist attack on the building of the lower house of Dutch parliament. Source: [NL Times](#) [153]
- **October 2005:**Seven members of the Hofstad Group, a local jihadist network, are arrested during an arrest raid in The Hague, Amsterdam, Leiden, and Almere. The Hofstad members had reportedly planned to attack the Dutch parliament and intelligence service headquarters and assassinate several politicians. Sources: [NCTV](#) [108], [New York Times](#) [154]
- **November 10, 2004:**Dutch police raid the apartment of Jason Walters and Ismail Akhnikh in The Hague. Walters reportedly planned to assassinate Member of Parliament Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Walters and Akhnikh are both members of the Hofstad Group. Walters throws a hand grenade into the street during the raid, wounding three officers. Source: [Washington Post](#) [107]
- **November 2, 2004:**Mohammed Bouyeri slits the throat of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh for what Bouyeri said were insults to Islam. The suspects are charged with planning attacks and storing unstable explosives. Ranging in age between 19 and 29, six of the suspected terrorists are Danish nationals and two hold Danish residency permits. Sources: [BBC News](#) [112], [BBC News](#) [113], [New York Times](#) [114]
- **May 12, 2003:**The trial of 12 suspected Islamist militants accused of helping to recruit for al-Qaeda begins. The men are suspected members of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, a predecessor to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. The official charges range from forging travel documents, possessing illegal weapons, drug dealing, human trafficking, to receiving stolen goods. Source: [CNN](#) [155]
- **May 6, 2002:**Volkert Van der Graaf, a militant environmentalist and animal rights activist, guns down extreme right-wing politician Pim Fortuyn days before national elections. He is sentenced to 18 years imprisonment, but is released after serving just under 12 years in May 2014. Sources: [New York Times](#) [47], [Independent](#) [156], [New York Times](#) [157]

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Domestic Counter-Extremism

Counterterrorism remains high on the country's current policy agenda. The Dutch government plans to focus on the de-radicalization and reintegration of returning foreign fighters in 2019. The Netherlands seeks to mitigate the risks that stem from the expected high numbers of returnees and the continuous threat of homegrown radicalization of Dutch residents. In addition, the government will allocate an estimated 15 million euros for the prevention of recidivism. (Source: [Government of the Netherlands](#) [158])

The Dutch government tightened its border security following the November 13, 2015, ISIS terror attacks in Paris that killed 130 people; the next day, the Dutch cabinet held an emergency meeting. The government said it took "visible and invisible measures" after the Paris attacks. These measures include increasing security at large events such as soccer games, and monitoring all transportation traffic, particularly to France. The NCTV had already begun boosting security measures after the deadly January 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* shootings in Paris. Those attacks confirmed the potential threat of terrorism facing the Netherlands, according to the country's counterterrorism unit NCTV. In May 2016, dozens of Dutch schools also canceled trips abroad to European capitals in response to parents' concerns. According to a Dutch survey, 72 percent of about 100 schools said they had received more terrorism-related questions than usual from parents ahead of school trips abroad. (Sources: [NL Times](#) [159], [NL Times](#) [160], [Dutch News](#) [161], [Dutch News](#) [162])

Dutch authorities have recently cracked down on suspected terrorists, targeting men and women who they have previously monitored for signs of radicalization. The spring of 2017 saw an uptick in arrests, investigations, and temporary detentions of Dutch citizens suspected of planning terrorist attacks. The new counterterrorism laws passed on March 1, 2017, have already been used on at least one occasion in the temporary detention of a suspicious person during the April 9 Rotterdam Marathon. (Sources: [NL Times](#) [133], [NL Times](#) [134], [NL Times](#) [135], [NL Times](#) [136], [The Malaysian Insight](#) [137], [NL Times](#) [139], [NL Times](#) [140])

The Dutch National Terrorism List included 139 individuals and organizations as of July 2018. The list is largely comprised of 104 men, 32 women, and three organizations. The individuals and groups on the list are subject to asset freezes in the Netherlands. A government statement said the freeze makes it harder for Dutch citizens to aid would-be foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria. (Sources: [NL Times](#) [163], [Reuters](#) [164], [Government of the Netherlands](#) [56], [AIVD](#) [5], [Government of the Netherlands](#) [56])

In its 2017 budget, presented in September 2016, the Dutch government increased allocations for counterterrorism and defense. The government allocated 10 million euros for counterterrorism, which will increase to 22 million euros in 2019. An additional 20 million euros are earmarked for improving border security and background checks on immigrants. The government also allocated 5 million euros to conflict prevention and combating violent extremism abroad. In October 2017, the Dutch government announced that it will dedicate an additional sum of 12.5 million euros for counterterrorism efforts beginning in 2018. The government's September 2018 budget plan also revealed an additional investment of 116 million euros for national security, providing extra funds for strengthening cybersecurity and counterterrorism measures. (Sources: [Dutch News](#) [165], [NL Times](#) [166], [U.S. Department of State](#) [11], [Government of the Netherlands](#) [167], [Government of the Netherlands](#) [168])

Dutch schools announced plans in June 2015 to begin scanning their computer networks for keywords that may signal radicalizations among students. The list of terms includes "jihad," "YODO" (You Only Die Once), and ISIS. The software alerts school officials when search terms are entered on school computers and allows faculty to save screenshots. (Source: [NL Times](#) [169])

The Dutch government is undertaking a concerted effort to rehabilitate minors identified as having been indoctrinated and/or victimized by ISIS. Dutch intelligence and security agencies evaluate each minor individually to determine what care, security arrangements, and interventions are suitable. Experts in the fields of radicalization, youth care, and psychological trauma provide advice. (Source: [Government of the Netherlands](#) [16])

Legislation

Beginning in 2004, the Dutch authorities took what they called a "broad approach" to counterterrorism and counter-extremism, focusing on combating radicalization as well as terrorism. As part of this approach, the government passed the

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national Action Plan on Polarization and Radicalization for 2007-2011 to prevent the formation of extremist groups. This \$38 million plan focused on criminal prosecution of terrorism suspects, increased intelligence activities, and using immigration laws against overseas suspects. The government believes this plan significantly weakened established jihadi networks and limited radicalization between 2005 and 2010. (Sources: [AIVD](#) [81], [New York Times](#) [170])

On February 7, 2017, the Dutch Senate passed three new bills designed to strengthen existing counterterrorism legislation. The first bill allows the government to revoke Dutch citizenship without a court order for anyone “16 years of age or older who voluntarily enters the armed services of a state involved in combat operations against the Kingdom or against an alliance of which the Kingdom is a member; ...[or] if it appears that he has joined an organization that is on a list of organizations participating in a national or international armed conflict and that poses a threat to national security.” The second bill allows the government to impose a six month ban on any citizen, preventing their ability to leave the country or meet with specified people, or visit specific places as determined by the government. The third bill amends the Dutch Passport Act, which allows authorities to impose travel bans on suspected criminals. With the new amendment, a travel ban now results in immediately nullifying that person’s passports and identification card. (Sources: [Library of Congress](#) [10], [U.S. Department of State](#) [11])

These new laws—which have been under [consideration](#) [171] since mid-2015—have been heavily criticized by left-leaning parties in the Netherlands and human rights organizations for “violate[ing] a range of human rights.” (Sources: [Library of Congress](#) [10], [Amnesty International](#) [172], [Netherlands Committee of Jurists for Human Rights](#) [173])

In August 2014, the Dutch government announced “The Netherlands comprehensive action programme to combat jihadism” (the “[Action Plan](#) [174]”) to weaken the domestic jihadist movement, decrease radicalization, and protect the rule of law. The Action Plan called for increasing outreach to the Dutch Muslim community and religious leaders. The NCTV announced in November 2014 that it would also create a special support unit that will provide help and advice to families and peers of people with jihadist sympathies. Some assistance will also be provided to extremists who want to leave the jihadist movement. (Sources: [Dutch News](#) [12], [NCTV](#) [13])

The Action Plan also expands the government’s authority to take action against religious leaders who use their pulpits to preach extremism. Foreign Islamic clerics who preached extremism in Dutch mosques would face deportation. The government had previously banned radical imams from coming to the Netherlands while deporting others between 2003 and 2007. (Sources: [Dutch News](#) [175], [NCTV](#) [13])

The government has tightened travel restrictions on suspected jihadists. The Action Plan boosts government powers to strip citizens of their nationality if they join overseas terrorist organizations or play a role in foreign terror training camps. As of November 2015, the NCTV had flagged 150 passports of suspected jihadists that had expired so they could not be renewed. The government is also considering a general ban on travel to Syria and Iraq. The NCTV reported in November 2015 that five people’s assets have been frozen and more than 90 people have stopped receiving social benefits as a result of the Action Plan. (Sources: [Dutch News](#) [176], [NCTV](#) [13], [NCTV](#) [66], [Government of the Netherlands](#) [61])

Suspected jihadists and known foreign fighters who have returned to the Netherlands are required to check in daily with the police. In February 2015, Dutch media reported that police stations are refusing these people entry out of safety concerns. They have been required to report to the police through an intercom or be subject to a search at police stations’ back entrances. (Source: [Dutch News](#) [177])

Further, the new laws seek to stem the spread of online extremism by targeting Internet providers that allow terror groups to spread jihadist propaganda. A specialist unit within the National Police will work with Internet providers to ban offenders. The unit will also monitor and report offenses to the Public Prosecution Service. (Source: [NCTV](#) [13])

In July 2016, the Dutch government released its new 2016-2020 National Counterterrorism Strategy. The strategy contains measures to enhance resilience against radicalization and prevent individuals to join terrorist networks, among other strategic principles. A local and community-based approach is one cornerstone for future preventive efforts. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [11], [NCTV](#) [178])

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International Counter-Extremism

The Dutch government invests in bilateral, multilateral, and EU-level relations in the field of counterterrorism. During the Dutch presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2016, the Council focused on improving the exchange of information and databases across European countries. In 2017, the Netherlands co-chaired the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) and its Foreign Terrorist Fighters working group. (Sources: [NCTV](#) [179], [U.S. Department of State](#) [11])

The Dutch government believes extremists pose a threat to fragile governments in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region as well as to Europe. The Netherlands has participated in several international counter-extremism operations and funded international counter-extremism efforts, as well as assist in security training and border control operations across MENA. The 2018 Defence White Paper announced future goals and tactics of the Dutch military to better respond to current threats. After yearlong budget cuts, the Ministry of Defense has allocated about 9.7 million euros (approximately 1.29 percent of the GDP) in 2018 to support and modernization of the Royal Armed Forces. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [180], [Ministry of Defence](#) [181])

ISIS

The Iraqi government requested U.N. intervention against ISIS twice over the summer of 2014. The Dutch government views the requests as legal authority to intervene and announced in September that it will contribute to the military campaign against ISIS. The Dutch pledged six F-16 fighter jets for airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq and a maximum of 250 military personnel. The F-16s will operate from outside of Iraq. The Netherlands also announced it would provide another 130 Dutch personnel to train Iraqi and Kurdish forces in Iraq. This phase of the Dutch deployment was initially intended to last a maximum of one year, but Dutch F-16's continued to operate and flew more than 2,100 missions through July 2016. Approximately 150 Dutch trainers are still operating in Iraq. (Sources: [Government of the Netherlands](#) [182], [Dutch Ministry of Defence](#) [183])

In January 2016, the Netherlands announced it will begin bombing ISIS targets in Syria through July 1. Prime Minister Mark Rutte said six Dutch F-16 fighter jets that had previously only struck ISIS targets in Iraq would also target ISIS training camps and operations in Syria. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has criticized the Dutch government's participation in airstrikes against ISIS in Syrian territory, arguing that they should coordinate with his government if they are serious about fighting terrorism. Since the end of the Netherlands air combat missions in July 2016, 35 Dutch personnel have been deployed to protect the Belgian F-16s that began flying missions as part of the anti-ISIS coalition. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [184], [NL Times](#) [65], [Dutch Ministry of Defence](#) [183])

Afghanistan

In 2010, the Netherlands ended its four-year commitment of 1,950 troops to NATO's International Security Assistance Force Afghanistan (ISAF). The soldiers had supported NATO efforts against a Taliban insurgency. Twenty-four Dutch troops died and 140 were wounded during the mission. After ending its commitment to ISAF, the Netherlands contributed 100 military personnel to the NATO mission Resolute Support, which launched January 1, 2015, to further train, advise, and assist Afghan security forces. The Netherlands planned on contributing to this mission until the end of 2021. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [185], [Government of the Netherlands](#) [186], [NATO](#) [187], [Ministry of Defence](#) [188])

Bahrain

The Netherlands is one of 25 countries participating in the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) mission in the waters around the Arabian Peninsula. CMF is charged with combating extremism and terrorism, piracy, human trafficking, and improving general security in the region. (Source: [Dutch Ministry of Defence](#) [189])

Iraq

The Netherlands deployed troops to Iraq in 2003 as part of the U.N. stabilization force. Dutch contributions included military police, Royal Netherlands Navy, Air Force, and Royal Netherlands Army forces. The Netherlands also provided

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training and strategic advice to Iraqi forces. Dutch troops left Iraq until 2005. The Netherlands will participate in this mission through the end of 2018. (Sources: [U.S. Army](#) [190], [Ministry of Defence](#) [191])

Lebanon

The Netherlands has committed to financial support in the fight against extremism in Lebanon. In March 2014, the government announced plans to invest 1.8 million euros in the Lebanese security sector over the next three years. The funds will go toward border management and training in civil-military cooperation. The Netherlands has donated 83.5 million euros to Lebanon since 2011 for humanitarian aid. Almost a third of this money has gone toward refugee aid programs. Additionally, 12 Dutch military personnel are stationed with United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) along the Lebanon-Israel-Syria border and two military personnel are stationed in the Golan Heights with the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). (Sources: [Government of the Netherlands](#) [192], [Dutch Ministry of Defence](#) [193])

Mali

The Netherlands committed 450 Special Forces troops to the U.N. Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in 2014. The country has also contributed helicopters and other military vehicles, as well as military personnel to train Malian police. By March 2017, all Dutch attack and transport helicopters had returned to the Netherlands, their roles in Mali replaced by German forces. Currently, 30 police officers are working within the U.N. mission to train Malian police forces and assist in strengthening the judicial and security systems. One additional Dutch soldier participates in the European Union Training Mission for Mali. The Dutch military will contribute to this mission until the end of 2018. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [194], [Dutch Ministry of Defence](#) [195], [Dutch Ministry of Defence](#) [196], [Dutch Ministry of Defence](#) [197])

The U.N. Security Council created MINUSMA in April 2013 to support the transitional authorities and stabilization of Mali as France sought to reduce its presence in the country (France had led a 2012 military intervention in Mali against Islamist groups). The Dutch see the mission as necessary to combat a growing security threat to the Netherlands and Europe from the region. Dutch forces are using human and electronic intelligence to gather information on Islamic militants. Intelligence has not previously been included in U.N. missions. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [180], [United Nations](#) [198], [Foreign Policy](#) [199])

The Netherlands had previously praised France's 2013 intervention against Islamist militants in Mali. (Source: [Government of the Netherlands](#) [200])

Somalia

Dutch naval vessels continue to patrol the Gulf of Aden and off the Horn of Africa, conducting anti-piracy missions as part of the European Union's Operation Atalanta. Forward Support Element (FSE) Mirage, a four-person detachment based in al-Minhad Airbase, UAE, provides additional logistical support to Dutch marines operating in the area, as well as to Dutch aircraft using the base. Dutch participation in the operation is scheduled to end by 2018. Additionally, between six and 15 Dutch military personnel participate in the 150-man European Training Mission in Somalia (EUTM), helping train the Somali Army. (Sources: [Ministry of Defence](#) [201], [Ministry of Defence](#) [202], [Government of the Netherlands](#) [203])

South Sudan

In the past, the Netherlands has contributed approximately 30 personnel to the U.N. Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). As of June 2017, only six Dutch staff officers are stationed at UNMISS headquarters. UNMISS is responsible for protecting the civilian population, monitoring human rights, and supporting the delivery of humanitarian aid. (Sources: [Dutch Ministry of Defence](#) [204], [Dutch Ministry of Defence](#) [193])

The Netherlands does not provide aid directly to the South Sudan government. The Netherlands instead contributes to NGOs in the country to aid South Sudan's security, rule of law, food security, and water. The Netherlands earmarked approximately 35 million euros in 2012. The government earmarked 55 million euros in its annual budget between 2013

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and 2015. In May 2014, the Netherlands suspended its development aid to South Sudan because of the country's poor human-rights record. At the same time, the Netherlands also pledged an additional 5 million euros in emergency aid for victims of the conflict between the South Sudanese government and rebel forces. (Sources: [Government of the Netherlands](#) [205], [Sudan Tribune](#) [206], [Government of the Netherlands](#) [207])

Public Opinion

Military Force Against Terrorism

According to a Pew Research Center poll released in August 2016, 77 percent of Dutch citizens support U.S.-led military action against ISIS. However, only 30 percent of those polled believed that using overwhelming military force is the best way to defeat terrorism, while 66 percent believed that relying too much on military force creates hatred that leads to more terrorism. (Source: [Pew Research Center](#) [18])

Top Threats to Netherlands

A study by Statistics Netherlands published on June 19, 2017, found that 70 percent of Dutch citizens are worried about a terrorist attack in their country and that 40 percent believe there is a "good chance" one will occur. Despite this only 4 percent believe they personally will be a victim. (Source: [NL Times](#) [208])

A Pew Research Center poll conducted in the spring of 2016 found that 71 percent of Dutch citizens view ISIS as the top threat to their country. Other threat options in the poll included global climate change (56 percent), global economic instability (48 percent), cyberattacks from other countries (50 percent), and the large number of refugees leaving Syria/Iraq (30 percent). (Source: [Pew Research Center](#) [19])

Right-Wing Support

In March 2017 parliamentary elections, far-right politician Geert Wilders and his anti-Islam Freedom Party (PVV) won 20 seats in the Netherlands's 150-seat parliament, making the PVV the second-largest party. Wilders had previously led opinion polls ahead of the election. In December 2016, Dutch citizens told the *Guardian* that they supported the PVV's far-right views because they felt the government ignored their voices. Wilders's platform called for closing Dutch borders to immigration and withdrawing the Netherlands from the European Union. In February 2016, as the PVV celebrated its 10th anniversary, Wilders pledged to keep reducing Islam in daily life. (Sources: [NPR](#) [39], [New York Times](#) [40], [Guardian](#) [209], [Bloomberg Business](#) [210], [NL Times](#) [211])

Wilders saw a popularity boost in the days after the *Charlie Hebdo* attack in January 2015. If elections had been held then, the PVV would have become the largest party in parliament, according to a poll taken shortly after the attack. Further, more than 80 percent of respondents favored revoking the citizenship of those who leave the Netherlands to fight in Syria and imposing long prison terms for returning foreign fighters. (Source: [Reuters](#) [212])

Charlie Hebdo

Days after the deadly January 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* shootings in Paris, tens of thousands of Dutch citizens took to the streets in solidarity for the victims. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte and Amsterdam Mayor Eberhard van der Laan led a 17,000-strong solidarity rally in Amsterdam.

Dutch newsstands largely sold out of *Charlie Hebdo* a week after the attack. Later in January, transit authorities reportedly refused requests by the youth wings of the Liberal, Labor, and Green political parties to hang posters of *Charlie Hebdo* anti-Islam art in Dutch train stations. The train operators reportedly said they refused the request because of the offensive nature of the cartoons. (Sources: [Dutch News](#) [213], [NL Times](#) [214], [10 News](#) [215])

CEP Polling

The Netherlands: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

The Counter Extremism Project (CEP) has also conducted extensive research into Dutch opinions on extremism and efforts against Middle Eastern extremist groups. According to CEP's September 2014 poll, 61 percent of the Dutch believe Islamic extremist movements represent the greatest threat to Dutch national security, while 76 percent believe Islamic extremism is likely to be a serious threat over the next 10 years.

Forty-eight percent believe fighting Islamic extremism should be a top priority. In contrast, 32 percent believe fighting Islamic extremism is important but should not be a top priority given other issues facing the country. Approximately 43 percent believe the government does not spend enough time and resources in reducing the threat of Islamist extremism, compared with just 22 percent that believes the government spends enough resources.

Seventy-five percent of the Netherlands believes Islamist extremism will destabilize the Middle East. While 78 percent believes growing Islamist extremism in the Middle East and North Africa is dangerous.

Overseas, 68 percent of the Netherlands supports U.S. engagement in Iraq targeting ISIS, while only 13 percent is opposed. The Dutch largely support (58 percent) U.S. targeted airstrikes against ISIS, but support drops (38 percent) for putting Dutch troops on the ground. (Source: [Counter Extremism Project](#) [20])