



The Dutch Terror Plot: A Cultural Motive

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Key Events

It can be argued that the motive for the Dutch terrorist plot is identity-based and conducted in response to the perceived anti-Islam stance of the Dutch government. The motive behind the plot allegedly stems from a cultural conflict between the Dutch people and Muslims living in the Netherlands. Suspects have claimed that they were conducting an act against the Dutch government (Tingle & Dyer, 2018). The seven men suspected of plotting the attack were arrested in the Netherlands. The planning of the attack appeared to be in its advanced stages when the men were arrested, classifying the preparations as a level four threat (Crisp, 2018, para. 9). It appears that the suspects planned to use rifles and bomb vests, and were prepared to detonate a vehicle (Crisp 2018, para. 1; Tingle & Dyer, 2018, para. 8; Wilkinson, 2018, para. 5). The leader of the group is suspected to be Hardi N., who has been convicted of attempting to join the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Hardi allegedly belonged to a group of Arnhem jihadists, a radical Islamist group in the Netherlands (Crisp, 2018, para. 5; Tingle & Dyer, 2018, para. 4-5; Wilkinson, 2018, para. 5).

Nature of Discussion

This briefing note will cover the following inquiries: what is the potential motive behind the Dutch terror plot? Are there similarities to other

attacks and terror plots in Europe and Canada? What is the relevance to Canada, particularly the West coast?

Background

The current security dilemma focuses on an era of transnational violent crime and non-state actors; this is when attacks are not conducted in retaliation to the state, but instead are between groups who identify differently, which creates marginalization and division between cultures. It can be argued that people who do not identify with a specific culture or other identity can feel displaced. In this case, the perceived anti-Islamist stance by the government, including statements or competitions which mock Islam, could cause a greater divergence between majority and minority cultures. The minority may choose to align themselves with Islamist culture and ideologies if they feel the government has created a divide between cultures within a state. This may then lead some individuals to further identify with Islamist extremist groups, such as ISIL, due to feelings of shared values and/or search for acceptance. The Dutch plotters may have a better sense of belonging with Islamist groups than they do with the Dutch people.

On Thursday, September 27, police arrested seven men in the Netherlands who were suspected of plotting a terror attack. Police raided properties in Arnhem and Weert (Crisp, 2018, para. 6; Tingle & Dyer, 2018, para. 3). The men ranged in age from twenty-one to thirty-four (Crisp, 2018, para. 2; Tingle & Dyer, 2018, para. 3; Wilkinson, 2018, para. 3). Hardi, who is believed to be the ringleader, was arrested as well. Hardi is a thirty-four-year-old Iraqi man allegedly belonging to a group of Arnhem jihadists, and was convicted in 2017 of attempting to join ISIL (Crisp, 2018, para. 5; Tingle & Dyer, 2018, para. 4-5; Wilkinson, 2018, para. 5). Two of the other suspects arrested by police were also previously convicted of traveling overseas in an attempt to join extremist groups (Crisp, 2018, para. 5; Tingle & Dyer, 2018, para. 5). The seven men live in the Netherlands, but identify with Islamist ideology and

culture. They identified their plot as a “firm deed against the Dutch government,” arguably because the Netherlands supported the United States (US) in the fight against ISIL (Tingle & Dyer, 2018, para. 17). The men arrested claimed the attack would take place at a major event in the Netherlands and would involve many victims (Crisp, 2018, para. 3; Tingle & Dyer, 2018, para. 4; Wilkinson, 2018, para. 2). This event can be classified as a form of fifth generation warfare, as the motives behind the plot appear to have stemmed from a cultural identity clash between different elements of the Dutch population (Reed, 2008).

The current threat level identified by this attempted attack is a threat level four, meaning the chances of the attack occurring were highly likely (Crisp, 2018, para. 9). Police found five guns and a white van when conducting the raids. Allegedly, the suspects were attempting to obtain AK47 assault rifles, handguns, bomb vests, grenades, and bomb making materials (Crisp 2018, para. 1; Tingle & Dyer, 2018, para. 8; Wilkinson, 2018, para. 5). Prosecutors claimed that the suspects were planning to train with these weapons and had “advanced preparations” of plotting an attack (Tingle & Dyer, 2018, para. 10; Wilkinson, 2018, para. 3). The suspects allegedly planned to use assault rifles and bomb vests, as well as detonating a car when carrying out the attack. The location of the planned attack cannot be identified as of yet (Wilkinson, 2018, para. 6).

A similar incident took place in the Netherlands weeks before, where comparable motives and identity conflict were present. An attack involving a 19-year-old Afghan, with German permanent residence, took place in the Netherlands in August 2018. The suspect in this attack claimed that Islam is frequently insulted by the country. The suspect stabbed two American tourists in an Amsterdam railway station (Crisp, 2018, para. 12; Tingle & Dyer, 2018, para. 29; Wilkinson, 2018, para. 7). It can be argued that in both incidents the suspect’s motive for attack was nearly identical. It is important to note that prior to the occurrence

of this attack, Dutch politician Geert Wilders held a cartoon drawing competition. In this competition, participants could submit caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad, angering many Muslims in the country as their religion forbids anyone from depicting the prophet (Tingle & Dyer, 2018, para. 31).

Key Points of Discussion and West Coast Perspectives

The violence discussed appears to be unorganized and mostly individual, and therefore it is difficult to pinpoint connections to a wider strategy or organization. It can be argued that the purpose of these seemingly random attacks is to alienate other individuals or groups who do not identify in the same way as the assailant (Field, 2017, p. 478; Wilner, 2017, p. 412). Planned violent attacks are arguably a product of the current social environment, where identity conflict appears to be on the rise, and is causing individuals and groups to seek radical solutions to solve perceived issues (Field, 2017, p. 475). Furthermore, one can postulate that the formal ties linking individuals or groups to larger organizations or states are becoming more difficult to determine (Wilner, 2017, p. 415-419). It can, therefore, be argued that fifth generation warfare identity conflict is a new security concern which intelligence agencies must seek to combat.

There appears to be a rise in identity-based attacks on the east coast of Canada, specifically Ottawa and Quebec, and these incidents are moving closer to British Columbia (BC), with the most recent one occurring in Edmonton. Arguably, it is not unreasonable that terror plots, like the Dutch terror plot, could occur in BC. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) have previously investigated the Canada Day bomb involving John Nuttall and Amanda Korody, who allegedly placed pressure-cooker bombs on the lawn of the BC Provincial Legislature in Victoria. The couple were found guilty of conspiring to commit murder, possession of an explosive substance, and the placement of an explosive substance in a public place on behalf of a terrorist organization (Dhillon,

2017, para. 2; Omand, 2018, para. 3). The couple has since been released, with the terror charges dropped; however, the fact remains that a plot was in place and ready to be acted upon.

The fact that a known active terror plot in BC has already been under investigation raises the following questions: what steps can the RCMP take to prevent or deter active terror plots in BC? In anticipating active terror plots, what efforts can be made to protect the Canadian public from this type of conflict? What efforts can be made by the provincial and federal governments to limit the possibility of creating identity conflict between different cultures in Canada? If there is current cultural tension, what can be done to avoid the likelihood of conflict? Are the current deterrence methods against radicalization effective?

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