

National Coordinator for Counterterrorism (NCTb)

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT OF TERRORISM

In the Netherlands, various organisations collect and analyse information on terrorism and terrorist threats: the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), the Military Intelligence and Security Service (MIVD), the police and the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism (NCTb). The NCTb prepares integrated threat assessments and input for decision-making. Its work serves various purposes, ranging from protecting individuals to issuing timely warnings for business sectors or developing new policy. Its areas of emphasis depend on the goal of the assessment. As a result, its output is varied and tailored to specific uses. For instance, the NCTb has three systems for responding to terrorist threats.

- **The Terrorist Threat Assessment Netherlands(DTN)**

The DTN is a broad-based analysis of the national and international terrorist threat to the Netherlands and Dutch interests abroad. It is thus an assessment of the potential terrorist threat to the Netherlands *as a whole*. The DTN is intended for policymakers, senior civil servants and members of the government. Counterterrorism policy is formulated on the basis of the DTN, though no security measures are taken on the direct basis of this system. Where appropriate, such measures are taken in the context of the two systems described below.

- **The Counterterrorism Alert System (ATb)**

This system determines the degree of the terrorist threat to a *set of targets*, namely specific vital business sectors. In the event of a terrorist threat, the sectors are alerted, and security measures are taken by both the sectors themselves and the government.

- **The Surveillance and Protection System**

This system determines the degree of the threat to an *individual object*, service or individual. It serves as the basis for specific security measures taken by government.

	Terrorist Threat Assessment	Counterterrorism Alert	Surveillance and
For whom is the information	Politicians, policymakers, government bodies	Relevant sectors and the government	Government
Objective	To provide a general description of the potential threat to the Netherlands: what is the probability that a terrorist attack will take place in the Netherlands within a specific period? Informs the public about	To provide a description of the terrorist threat to a particular vital business sector. Intended to make it possible to take sector-specific measures in the event a higher threat	To state the severity and probability of a threat to a specific object, service or individual. Intended to make it possible to take specific security measures in the event of
Threat levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal • Limited • Substantial • Critical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard • Low threat • Moderate threat • High threat 	Combination of the <i>severity</i> of the potential damage and/or injury and the <i>likelihood</i> that an
Who or what is under threat?	The Netherlands as a whole (non-place-specific).	Participating sectors.	Everybody in the Netherlands divided in local and central domain (limitative list)
Measures	The DTN is too general to serve as a direct basis for security measures.	A package of measures (tailored to the threat level) is taken by both the sector in question and	Government takes measures tailored to the threat level.

Terrorist Threat Assessment Netherlands (DTN)

The Terrorist Threat Assessment Netherlands describes the potential terrorist threat to the Netherlands as a whole. A new DTN is issued by the NCTb every three months, in order to inform politicians and public officials (and through them, the public) about terrorism-related threats to the Netherlands and Dutch interests abroad.

A wide range of information, both public and classified, is used to determine the general threat level, including information relating to the preliminary stages of terrorism, such as radicalisation and recruitment. Many different elements are taken into account, which may differ in nature, origin, tangibility, visibility and relevance to current events. Determining the general threat level is not a matter of identifying specific places or times, but of answering the question: how great is the overall probability that the Netherlands will be subject to a terrorist attack? That probability can be *minimal*, *limited*, *substantial* or *critical*. Because the DTN is so general in nature, it does not serve as the sole basis for any security measures. Furthermore, it would be ill-advised to wait for the next DTN before taking such measures. If government bodies possess information about a current specific threat, they must take immediate action. The Counterterrorism Alert System and the Surveillance and Protection System were developed for just such situations.

The primary impact of the DTN is on government counterterrorism policy. For instance, it might lead government bodies to place more emphasis on countering processes of radicalisation or to devote more attention to the role of women in terrorist networks.

The different threat levels used in the DTN represent *threat ranges* without firm boundaries. This means that the nature, extent and background of the threat may vary without necessitating a change in the threat level. Four such ranges have been defined, corresponding to four general threat levels. The elements associated with each level in the table below are merely illustrative and not by definition linked to the range in question.

Minimal

- It is unlikely that attacks are being planned.
- National and international terrorist networks are almost non-existent.
- An open society and the risks associated with modern life make it impossible to fall below this level.

Limited

- The chance of a terrorist attack is relatively slight, though it cannot be ruled out entirely.
- No new trends or phenomena are observed which suggest a threat.
- Activities by terrorist networks have been hindered.
- The Netherlands is scarcely, if ever, mentioned in statements by terrorist networks that should be taken seriously.

Substantial

- There is a real chance that an attack will take place in the Netherlands.
- New trends and phenomena are observed which suggest a threat.
- Attacks are taking place in countries similar to the Netherlands.
- Radicalisation and recruitment are in progress on a significant scale.
- The Netherlands is mentioned regularly in statements by terrorist networks that should be taken seriously.

Critical

- There are strong indications that an attack will take place in the Netherlands.
- An attack has already taken place in the Netherlands and further attacks are very likely.
- The Netherlands is often mentioned in highly credible statements by terrorist networks, and serious threats are being made against specific targets.

Counterterrorism Alert System (ATb)

The ATb is a warning system connected to 14 economic sectors, particularly those related to critical infrastructure. Using a range of alert levels (standard - low - moderate - high) tied to a package of associated security measures, the system offers a structure by which these sectors can respond to terrorist threats, with the assistance of the Dutch authorities. (NB ATb alert levels should not be confused with the DTN threat levels.)

Government authorities make arrangements with each participating sector in advance about the measures that can be taken at each threat level. That promotes swift and clear coordination in the event that a terrorist threat should materialise. This way of working is very useful given that a particular business sector is often located in multiple regions. At local level, however, it is necessary for companies and municipal authorities to work out the practical details of the measures together.

At national level, translating threat intelligence into specific security measures and coordinating their implementation is largely the responsibility of the Surveillance and Protection Coordinator (CBB) and the Surveillance and Protection Department (EBB) of the NCTb. In making this shift from analysis to action, the Surveillance and Protection System and the ATb follow practically the same procedures and processes.

Difference between DTN and Alert System

Threat information can lead to an alert if it is clear that the terrorist threat relates to a participating sector. The DTN takes account of all terrorist threats to the Netherlands. The DTN also takes account of precursory developments, like radicalisation and recruitment. These developments are not one-to-one equivalents of full-fledged terrorism; nor do they shed any light on issues like target selection and preparations for attacks, for instance on one of the sectors covered by the ATb.

This is why particular sectors can remain at 'standard' within the ATb system even if the DTN announces a substantial overall threat level. Conversely, the threat level in a particular sector may be 'high' even if the general threat level according to the DTN is 'substantial'. A threat to a specific sector does not necessarily warrant an increase in the threat level for the entire country.

The DTN is not designed to communicate the sort of detailed information about a possible terrorist threat that would be needed to take security measures in an ATb sector. In general, an increase in the DTN threat level (e.g. from 'limited' to 'substantial') indicates that there is a greater likelihood of a specific terrorist threat, while a decrease would tend to suggest the opposite. If specific threats have led to a terror alert and an increase in the ATb level for one or more sectors (and the adoption of associated security measures), the change may be reflected in the DTN threat level. If such a situation should arise, no additional measures are necessary because the appropriate steps will already have been taken at an earlier stage within the context of the ATb.

This means that if the local authorities or other relevant parties (the police, the economic sectors) are advised of a change to the DTN level, they are not obliged to take any security measures. The assessment provides only a general, abstract overview of the terrorist threat to the Netherlands. It should be read as a snapshot of the present threat situation and a record of fluctuations in the threat level over time. For politicians and policymakers the changes charted in the DTN may or may not justify a reassessment of counterterrorism policy or legislation, depending on the nature of the changes.

Surveillance & Protection (B&B)

The Surveillance and Protection System appoints responsible parties in the case of a threat (whether terrorist or otherwise) to individuals, objects or services. After analysing the likelihood and severity of a threat on the basis of information provided by the police and the intelligence and security services, it decides on the appropriate security measure using a sliding scale.

The B&B System is intended to make it possible to take swift security measures if a threat to a specific individual, service or object is identified. It is the core government system for ensuring protection of objects and individuals. Local authorities play the leading role in this area.

A report of a threat to an individual or object may come in at either national or subnational level, from the law enforcement authorities, intelligence services or the person or organisation under threat.

Responsibility

In the Netherlands, when objects, services and individuals are under threat (this includes terrorist threats), the basic principle is that citizens, enterprises and organisations bear primary responsibility for their own safety and security. Government can help them, however, if the threat assumes such proportions that they can no longer respond to it adequately on their own. Local authorities are generally responsible for taking security measures in such situations.

In addition, there is a list of individuals and objects in the national domain. This includes members of the Royal House, the prime minister, other members of government, members of parliament, ambassadors, embassies and certain international organisations, including some of a military nature. Individuals are included on this list if their security and their ability to go about their business freely are in the national interest. The responsibility for protecting these individuals from threats rests with the national authorities (the NCTb and, in particular, the Surveillance and Protection Department).

In summary, the distinction between the subnational and national domains is mainly a question of responsibility. The allocation of responsibility has no effect on what specific measures are taken; the same range of security measures is available for any individual, object or organisation.