



Council of the
European Union

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NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Independent jihadist threat

Courtesy translation

Since 2015, the **jihadist threat** has successively taken **three main forms**:

- the **threat of attacks planned in the Syrian-Iraqi area** by the ISIS external operations apparatus and carried out by individuals returning from the area;
- the **threat posed by ISIS members in the Syrian-Iraqi area** sharing **operational advice** with homegrown actors;
- the **homegrown threat, inspired by propaganda** calling for violent action and specifically targeting individuals who never had any contact in the Syrian-Iraqi area, but who **claimed their ideological affiliation** to terrorist organizations, the first of which being ISIS.

As ISIS accumulated military defeats, **its ideological grip loosened**. Simultaneously, the **targeted neutralization** of ISIS executives and the isolation of survivors, who were forced into clandestinity, had a tangible impact on ISIS's operational and symbolic capacity to embody the threat.

Under these conditions, the jihadist threat is evolving, and correctly analyzing its causes is of paramount importance.

1. A threat increasingly independent from terrorist organizations

2020 may have marked **the beginning of a new type of threat**. Since this date, an increasing number of attacks carried out in Europe have shared **common characteristics** which **have laid the foundations of a phenomenon hereafter referred to as “independent jihadist threat”**. This concept is different from that of “lone actors”, which refers to individuals inspired by propaganda and more broadly by terrorist organizations. Some terrorists now seem to **have shaken off the influence of terrorist organizations, both operationally and ideologically**.

This type of attack, which is **seldom claimed**, is perpetrated by **isolated actors** who have a **tenuous or inexistent link** to the radical movement and who were previously **unknown to intelligence services**. These terrorists use **basic *modi operandi***, essentially with bladed or blunt weapons, which can however have a **major symbolic impact** when the attacks result in **spectacular actions** – such as beheadings – and target **specific groups or people** (law enforcement, individuals singled out as “blasphemers”, places of worship).

The profile of terrorists is also evolving, with **generally inexperienced** individuals who **recently rallied** the jihadist cause. The amount of time between radicalization and perpetration rarely exceeds a year, while their taking violent action can be speed up due to **psychological instability or even mental disorders**.

Lastly, recent episodes have shown the **extremely sensitive nature of the notion of blasphemy**, which rallies and mobilizes all streams of the radical Islamist scene, and which is likely to lead individuals **outside of the jihadist sphere of influence** to carry out attacks.

This evolution of the threat seems tangible in several European countries. Indeed, since early 2020, France, the United Kingdom, and Germany have faced series of attacks whose execution seems to correspond to this phenomenon : such is the case for the last seven attacks perpetrated in France – particularly the series of four attacks in the fall of 2020, including the beheading of teacher Samuel PATY –, several attacks in the United Kingdom, such as the murder of MP David AMESS last October, and in Germany, most notably the knife attack perpetrated by an individual with mental disorders in Bavaria in June 2021.

And yet, the implications of this phenomenon are not neutral:

- the independence of these actors makes **detection** and **hindering/obstruction** work more difficult, as our security services have to face **new challenges**;
- while most of these changes are a logical evolution of previous trends, they are likely to lead to a diversification of the **jihadist threat, should it develop in Europe without any major outside influence**.

2. Questions

1. *Do the Member States share the abovestated view?*
2. *Regarding thwarted, planned or successful attacks in your country, what types of profiles, targets, and modi operandi did you observe? In your experience, what was the level of influence exerted by international jihadist organizations on these individuals, and, more broadly, on the radical scene?*
3. *When applicable, how do your counter-terrorism units adapt to this evolution of the threat, and what lessons could we take away from their experience?*
4. *Would you agree to include this concept in the six-monthly EU threat assessment in the field of counterterrorism?*