



General Intelligence and  
Security Service  
*Ministry of the Interior and  
Kingdom Relations*

# 2022

> AIVD annual report





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# Foreword



**Erik Akerboom**  
Director General  
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The threats against the Netherlands and Dutch interests in 2022 were sometimes plain for all to see. On the morning of 24 February, air raid sirens could be heard from Kiev to the Black Sea as Russia unleashed the largest war in Europe since the Second World War.

All of us in the Netherlands are probably familiar with images of the suffering that Russia has caused in Ukraine, and all of us have seen the effects of the conflict in our own country, in the form of refugees, gas shortages, inflation and the threat of nuclear attack.

President Putin regards himself not only as being at war with Ukraine but also, and in more and more ways, in conflict with the West. Conversely, people in the West hold the view that the conflict in Ukraine is also about our standards, values, freedom and prosperity.

What is more, the conflict is bringing pressure to bear on global rifts which were already coming to the surface, particularly the rift between the US and China. Their economic and geopolitical competition is forcing more and more countries to take sides, or in any event adopt a position. Europe is also reassessing its relationship with China.

Although China presents itself as a valued partner of the West, in terms of trade and otherwise, it also represents the greatest threat to our economic security. It has no scruples about spying on other countries, including in the Netherlands, for example via cyberattacks.

***More countries around the world have offensive cyberprogrammes which they sometimes use with great audacity. This constitutes a threat to our security, economic prosperity and way of life.***

More and more countries around the world have offensive cyberprogrammes which they sometimes use with great audacity. This constitutes a threat to our security, economic prosperity and way of life.

The intelligence and security services of the Netherlands are one of the best in the world when it comes to cybersecurity. However, they need to be able to operate in our attackers' environment and engage, for example, in cable interception.

***Extremists are responding to the concerns of our times by trying to link their world view to the doubts and anger felt by Dutch citizens.***

In 2022 the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) disrupted several possible threats by right-wing extremists in the Netherlands. Also in 2022 the police arrested a man for threatening a government minister. Following an official report about a possible jihadist threat the police arrested a 20-year-old Syrian who is suspected of preparing a terrorist crime. The AIVD assesses that the threat of attacks from networks directed by ISIS has recently been increasing, in particular from such networks in Afghanistan.

Examples like these illustrate how diverse terrorist and extremist threats against the Netherlands have become. What the various extremist groups have in common is that they are a threat to national security, plus that their message may undermine our democratic legal order. They may bring about a situation in which Dutch citizens wrongly lose confidence in each other and in the way our country is governed. That is a realistic danger and it is no coincidence that it exists at a time that confidence is already under pressure.

Extremists are responding to the concerns of our times by trying to link their world view to the doubts and anger felt by Dutch citizens.

This makes the difference between activism and extremism a highly topical issue. Criticism of government decisions, protests, and demonstrations (including those at the limits of what is legal) are part and parcel of a healthy democracy.

However, there is no room in such a democracy for the extremist world view which is based on a belief that hated enemies are always responsible for tragic or painful events – for example Jewish conspiracies or an evil elite. And there is absolutely no room at all for extremist ‘solutions’ which always come down to increased elimination, hatred, radicalisation, and ultimately violence. It is for this reason that one of the AIVD’s tasks is to investigate extremism.

2022 was not only a year of visible, urgent and diverse threats and considerable unrest and division. It was also a year of unity and collaboration in response to these. Western countries united in their response to Russian aggression and within the Netherlands more and more sections of government and social partners are collaborating to keep the Netherlands safe. That is why two of the special themes in this report focus on the above.


The AIVD is a piece of a much larger puzzle, but it is a special piece. In this annual report you may sometimes read about events which the AIVD was able to prevent or help prevent. Behind these allusions lies a world of dedication, hard work, and ingenuity.

As I reflect on 2022, I therefore want to say how proud I am of the people who work at the AIVD. The diversity of threats and the war in Ukraine demanded an extraordinary level of dedication from our teams. In such exceptional circumstances they carry on with their work behind the scenes, but the effect of that work is undeniable. It is thanks to their dedication that the Netherlands is a safer place.



# 1

## National threats



A poster in Limburg implies that Mark Rutte, Sigrid Kaag, Bill Gates, Klaus Schwab and George Soros are shot through the head.

CREDIT: ANP.



LD  
MIC  
AM



# THE GREAT



## THEME STORY

- In 2022 the democratic legal order in the Netherlands was visibly and invisibly under pressure, due to various threats adding up and affecting each other.
- The messages and actions of extremists, countries, and criminals can undermine democratic institutions and damage the trust Dutch citizens have in each other. They can also cause the population to feel less secure and safe.
- The AIVD's investigations contribute to a resilient response by the government, authorities, and society.

# The threats against the democratic legal order are adding up

In recent years the Netherlands has had to deal with a large number and considerable diversity of threats. These vary from terrorism and extremism from all kinds of movements and the dangers of offensive cyberprogrammes, to the continued development of weapons of mass destruction, espionage, covert influencing, interference, sabotage, the danger of crime having a harmful effect on the democratic legal order, and risks for the country's economic security.

In 2022 there was the additional threat of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which is the largest land war in Europe since the Second World War.

The sum of these threats affects our society. If numerous threats occur at the same time, this can create a dynamic in which threats have an effect on each other and unintentionally reinforce one another.

An increase in extremism on one side of the spectrum can lead to an extremist response on the other side. For example, the increased threat of violence by right-wing extremists in recent years was partly a response to the emergence of ISIS at the time and the hardening of attitudes among right-wing extremists may lead to a hardening of attitudes among left-wing extremists.

Threats can also pave the way for other threats. The war in Ukraine led to gas becoming scarce in Europe and that, in turn, helped to create a situation which gave advocates of anti-institutionalism a new opportunity after the coronavirus crisis to continue to spread conspiracy theories about an 'evil elite'. Conversely, the AIVD and the Military Intelligence and Security Service (MIVD) remain alert to prevent countries such as Russia from exploiting the unrest in the Netherlands to covertly fan the flames of polarisation in society.

There is also the risk of threats overlapping. In 2022 the democratic legal order of the Netherlands turned out to be particularly vulnerable in this respect. The democratic legal order covers the political and legal system in the Netherlands, the way in which the government and citizens interact, and the way in which citizens interact among themselves. This includes, for example, fundamental rights, freedoms, and the separation of powers.

Right-wing extremists, left-wing extremists and anti-institutional extremists have different interpretations of the role of the government which they regard, respectively, as a marionette of a 'Jewish conspiracy', as part of the 'capitalist, authoritarian system', or as 'an elite which wants to turn the Netherlands into a totalitarian state'.

However, in their own way and to their own extent they each spread the undermining message that you cannot trust the government and other democratic institutions. Some countries, like Russia, sometimes exploit the distrust of democratic institutions in order to add to social unrest in the West.



***No one knows if a journalist could decide not to write an article, a public prosecutor could decide not to pursue an investigation, or a local councillor could decide not to implement a measure because they believe the risks to the safety and security of themselves and their loved ones is unacceptable.***

Journalists, representatives of the authorities, lawyers, politicians, and administrators have also been the target of both extremists and organised crime during the past year.

If criminal actors constitute a threat to national security, and their activities lead to an undermining of the democratic legal order, it is the AIVD's task to investigate. That is the conclusion the ministries involved drew last year, after an exploratory investigation into this phenomenon one year earlier.

The combination of the undermining of the rule of law by organised crime and of extremism and exacerbated distrust can damage our social structure and that damage can stay undetected for a long period of time.

While acts of violence or public threats attract attention, their indirect consequences, or the insidious effect of (normalised) extreme ideology and layers of distrust, often do not.

No one knows if a journalist could decide not to write an article, a public prosecutor could decide not to pursue an investigation, or a local councillor could decide not to implement a measure because they believe the risks to the safety and security of themselves and their loved ones is unacceptable. If this were to occur both locally and across the whole of the Netherlands, it may also take a long time before it becomes evident how large the overarching problem actually is.

A similarly unseen development is the phenomenon of parents keeping their children from school because they regard education as an extension of the system which does not have their best interests at heart, or the phenomenon of people not participating in elections because they fundamentally distrust politicians.

The undermining actions or messages (by extremists, countries, or criminals) are not only damaging for the proper functioning of institutions, but may also lead to the crumbling of trust that Dutch people have in each other. That, in turn, damages the extent to which Dutch people are able to live together with others who hold different and wide-ranging views.

Because damage to the democratic legal order is difficult to measure, no hasty conclusions should be drawn. However, the threat to this from all corners makes it clear, in any event, that the democratic legal order is vulnerable and can never be seen as a given. It also shows that such extremism and criminal undermining of the democratic legal order can take place insidiously and that it requires a response aimed at increasing the resilience of the democratic legal order.

The AIVD has a role to play in this respect. Intelligence helps to differentiate between intentions, appearances, and facts. It clarifies the context in which threats exist – or whether they actually exist as it would appear – and who may be (covertly) behind them. Intelligence gives government authorities, the police, the public prosecution service, or other organisations the best possible chance of taking action.

For the proper functioning of the democratic legal order you not only need a resilient government, but also resilient citizens. The AIVD also helps to make society resilient in a variety of ways. The sections entitled 'Resilience requires a comprehensive approach' on page 42 and 'Cooperation makes the Netherlands safer' on page 50 provide up-to-date information on the state of affairs.

## > 1.1 Right-wing terrorism

- **In 2022 the AIVD prevented or helped to prevent a number of possible right-wing terrorist threats.**
- **The most significant terrorist threat by right-wing extremists is posed by a new generation of right-wing extremists who are primarily in contact with each other online.**
- **Anti-Semitism is the central theme of modern day right-wing extremist movements.**

The threat of right-wing terrorism was as real as ever in the Netherlands in 2022. During the course of the year the AIVD prevented a number of possible terrorist threats by right-wing extremists by actively disrupting them. The service also issued five official reports on the issue to the Public Prosecution Service and it was partly as a result of this that the police arrested a number of people who were suspected of being involved in activities linked to right-wing terrorism.

The AIVD also informed a number of its foreign partner services about (possible) threats so that they could take action.

Developments abroad reinforce the threat picture. Right-wing terrorists carried out attacks in Slovakia (Bratislava) and the United States (Buffalo), and in Belgium and Germany the police arrested several right-wing extremists who had accumulated an arsenal of weapons.

The group which poses the most significant right-wing terrorist threat is a relatively new generation of right-wing extremists, consisting of (mainly young) men who are internationally in contact with each other online via numerous chat groups, channels and platforms where they condone and glorify terrorist violence.

The largest and the most dominant source of inspiration for right-wing terrorist violence is the ideology of ‘accelerationism’, which is called this way because its supporters want to accelerate what they see as imminent racial conflict. They believe that violence is a useful tool and they expect the race war to change society to their benefit.

Although the composition of the Dutch movement is always changing – with online profiles being added and others disappearing – the group appears to be made up of several hundred supporters. This is similar to last year. It is difficult to predict who among these supporters actually wants to use terrorist violence.

Modern-day right-wing extremism is based primarily on anti-Semitism. Sometimes right-wing extremists latch onto social changes as a way of further disseminating their ideology. For example they may frame demographic changes as a conspiracy by ‘the Jewish elite’ and a deliberate attempt to weaken the position of the white race.

Their Great Replacement conspiracy theory states that this so-called elite is committed to ‘ethnic inversion’ or ‘Umvolkung’, ethnic mixing or the replacement of ‘the white race’. They allege that the main instrument for achieving this involves encouraging mass immigration, particularly from Islamic and African countries; immigrants who, in their eyes, have more children on average and a lower IQ. Once these measures have sufficiently weakened or thinned out the white population, it would be easier for ‘the Jewish elite’ to take control of them.

Some right-wing extremists groups blame left-wing parties, feminists, and the LHBTIQ+ community for contributing to that perceived development, with the latter two being blamed for providing fewer ‘white offspring’.

*Young men, who are in contact with each other internationally, condone and glorify terrorist violence.*

The threat which was posed in 2022 by accelerationism in particular and the right-wing extremist movement in general is inextricably linked to the ideology being primarily shared, propagated and discussed online. Characteristic of this online presence is the fact that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the various groups, clusters, and intermingling lone actors.

The same profiles may be active in accelerationist chat groups, neo-Nazi channels, in groups which identify as alt-right (a collective name which has been adopted from the US since 2016 for a new generation of white nationalists who want to keep 'the white race pure' and who do not form a coherent group with consistent ideas), and ethnonationalist groups (groups that believe that the white race is the basis for a country's national identity rather than, for example, shared values or culture).

Although a channel might appear not to voice support for terrorist attacks, it could still feature expressions of sympathy for the perpetrators and normalise hate and violence. Although only a small group of right-wing extremists appear to be in favour of terrorist violence, the difference between supporters and opponents of violence is not always clear online. In the right-wing extremist online environment the culture is so fundamentally nonconformist and provocation and morbid humour so commonplace that it is not obvious who is a supporter, sympathiser, or troll.

A second characteristic of the online landscape is how messages are packaged and distributed. This is seldom done in a way which innocent (young) viewers or followers can recognise as being right-wing extremist. Instead it is often packaged as 'humour' in illustrations and memes which are hateful towards one group in particular, for example the LHBTIQ+ community, feminists, left-wing activists, non-Western immigrants, Muslims, Jews, or politicians. Illustrations and memes like this are distributed outside the group's own channels, for example in online games, and they are often aimed at young people and a wider audience.

The AIVD has noticed a tendency for violent propaganda to attract followers sometimes purely because of the violence. Some young viewers are particularly fascinated by the use of weapons and violence. In a number of cases the right-wing extremist ideology and hatred of other population groups only starts playing a role in the radicalisation process later on.



## > 1.2 Right-wing extremism

- **Non-violent right-wing extremists groups may jeopardise the democratic legal order of the Netherlands.**
- **Their ideology can lead to radicalisation and is at odds with how the Netherlands is organised.**
- **People who incite extremism are trying to make use of current social discussions for their own ends.**

In order to protect the democratic legal order, the AIVD also investigates right-wing extremists groups that do not advocate terrorist attacks, but whose ideology is contrary to the ideas which form the foundation of that democratic legal order. If their movement were to become substantial in size or influence, that may come to jeopardise the continued existence of the democratic legal order in the Netherlands.

What is more, non-violent extremist groups may develop a breeding ground for radicalisation, based on the way they educate their supporters from a social and ideological perspective. Eventually, individual supporters may embrace the message of terrorist-oriented movements.

The right-wing extremist movement in the Netherlands is diverse and is made up of a small group of neo-Nazis, groups which are predominantly anti-Islam, so-called identitarian groups (which claim that they want to 'preserve the national identity' of every country, within clear national borders), and popular and ethnonationalists.

What the groups share despite their differences is a belief in the Great Replacement conspiracy theory. Consequently, there are also (younger) activists who hope that they can bring about more cooperation in Europe between the various smaller right-wing extremist movements around that idea, so that they can then build one large (international) movement.

The possibilities offered by technology and the shared language and culture online make this easier than it has been in the past. Despite that, they have not been able to form a large movement as yet due to cultural and ideological differences.

***If their movement were to become substantial in size or influence, that may come to jeopardise the continued existence of the democratic legal order in the Netherlands.***

The largest threat posed by non-violent right-wing extremist groups is that they manage to convince large numbers of people to accept their extreme ideas, conspiracy theories and (disguised) anti-Semitism.

People who incite right-wing extremism are therefore trying to piggyback off on current social issues. They use, for example, the political discussion on how much migration is desirable to propagate elements of the Great Replacement conspiracy theory (online).

## > 1.3 Anti- institutional extremism

- **The main narrative of anti-institutional extremists is a serious long-term threat for the Netherlands. That was the conclusion the AIVD drew in 2022.**
- **Their message is characterised by the belief that power in the Netherlands is in the hands of an evil elite which is ‘the enemy’ of the Dutch population.**
- **Since the coronavirus crisis that message continues to be revived and it currently appears to be the most popular extremist narrative in the country.**

The ideology that the Netherlands is being ruled by a small, evil elite that wants to suppress the population, turn people into slaves, and even murder them represents a serious threat for the country’s democratic legal order. It is a long-term threat because it would appear that this factually incorrect message will continue to be broadly disseminated and repeatedly revived.

That was the conclusion drawn by the AIVD in 2022 following a more detailed investigation into the effect that increasing distrust, based on extremist anti-institutional ideology, can have on national security.

Because the movement is hostile to all kinds of institutions that are important for the democratic legal order – ministers, Members of Parliament, journalists, scientists, the police, and judges – the AIVD has used the term ‘anti-institutional extremism’ since 2022, instead of the previously used term of ‘anti-government extremism’. Despite the fact that the coronavirus crisis has become a less important theme, the movement has probably increased in size.

The AIVD now typifies the main ideology of the anti-institutional movement as a ‘democracy-undermining narrative’, in other words a message (or messages) which threaten(s) the democratic legal order either because that is the exact purpose, or because that is the desired effect, and sometimes both. The AIVD also investigates other (extremist or terrorist) narratives.

A typical characteristic of the narrative of anti-institutional extremists is the idea that the Netherlands is being ruled by an evil elite which has control over, among other things, the government, the judiciary, the media, and the scientific community. That elite is said to be working towards creating a totalitarian surveillance state by suppressing people, turning them into slaves and even murdering them. The elite are accused of making up events and phenomena which serve as a pretext for ever-increasing control, for example in the guise of the coronavirus pandemic, the nitrogen emissions crisis, and the war in Ukraine.

Supporters of the narrative therefore claim to be living in an occupied territory and to be at war with the elite. They believe that members of the elite should be arrested, brought to justice in tribunals, and, according to some of them, executed.

The AIVD estimates that this ‘evil elite’ narrative is currently the most popular extremist narrative. It is impossible to specify exact numbers, but the AIVD estimates that there are likely more than one hundred thousand people who believe in the narrative to some extent or other.

The narrative represents a serious threat for two reasons. First and foremost, there is the risk that it will cause people to condone violence or even radicalise them to engage in violence. That risk became apparent in January 2022 when a man was arrested for threatening a minister. In 2021 a man was also arrested for plotting an assassination attempt on the Prime Minister.

*The choice of words of some activists creates a deliberate ambiguity which may lead supporters to engage in violent acts.*

**For more information,  
go to: [aivd.nl/extremism](https://aivd.nl/extremism)**

Up to now advocates of the narrative have not explicitly incited violent and extremist acts. Generally speaking, they are actually advocating non-violent resistance and, as yet, there have been few incidents of violence. However, these people do provide a framework for an enemy 'elite' with which supporters are at 'war'. The choice of words of some activists creates a deliberate ambiguity which may lead supporters to engage in violent acts.

Secondly, the continued dissemination of incorrect and hostile messages may create so much distrust with regard to (the legitimacy of) ministers, Members of Parliament, judges, police officers, journalists, and scientists that they are hampered in their work. This undermining of democratic institutions, together with the broadly disseminated message of distrust and the fact that people are starting to disengage, may be a threat to the continued existence of the democratic legal order.

Incidentally, anti-institutional extremists do not as such want to rid themselves of democracy, the government, judges, the police, the media and scientists in themselves, but instead want to change the way those institutions are currently being run. Until this has been achieved, some supporters want to create their own parallel legal order and society, for example with their own shadow government and own currency.

The AIVD has noticed that activists are putting their own spin on news events and so keep repeating the narrative. Initially they focused primarily on the coronavirus measures. Once most of those had been abolished, the number of supporters temporarily declined. Nowadays the focus is more on the climate crisis, the nitrogen emissions crisis, and the war in Ukraine, and the number of supporters is increasing again. Because the activists continue to link their narrative to new and important social themes, the AIVD expects the related threat to continue for the long term.



## > 1.4

# Left-wing extremism

- **Left-wing activism in the Netherlands has been on the rise.**
- **The presence of an insurrectional network and the internationalisation which the movement is undergoing may lead to radicalisation.**
- **More and more extremist groups are becoming involved in the theme of climate change.**

Left-wing activism in the Netherlands has been on the rise in recent years and that trend continued in 2022. The increase was mainly due to young people from large towns and cities becoming interested in anarchist and Marxist ideas. Many of them are women, partly as a result of the focus on feminism within the anarchist movement. While white masculinity is an important theme for many right-wing extremists, some left-wing activists are involved in the fight against what they see as the patriarchy – (the position of) the white man.

In 2022 the growth of the movement did not lead to an increase in the number of extremist activities and, generally speaking, actions have not been violent in recent years. The AIVD only investigates if there is an extremist element and does not investigate activism, because this does not involve the pursuit of undemocratic goals or the use of undemocratic methods.

However, radicalisation may occur, for example due to the influence of ideology which is at odds with the democratic legal order and the influence of extremist leaders. Several developments which occurred during the past year may lead to radicalisation like this and will make it more difficult to predict how groups and individuals from these movements will behave.

For example, the scene in the Netherlands is becoming more international. This development is relevant to the threat because the activism in other countries is often more radical and the left-wing extremists there use violence more frequently. More radical foreign activists and groups, or Dutch citizens inspired by them, may turn their backs on the protest culture in the Netherlands because they think they are too moderate. The risk is then that they will primarily look to connect with like-minded people, for example in online bubbles, and people may radicalise more quickly in such circumstances.

### *In recent decades insurrectional networks have carried out bomb attacks, arson, and bank robberies in various European countries.*

The presence of a so-called insurrectional network may also start to play a role. No more than a few dozen so-called insurrectional anarchists are currently active in the anarchist movement in the Netherlands. Insurrectional anarchism is a sub-movement of anarchism where the emphasis is on continuous ‘rebellion’ via underground, militant, illegal, and sometimes violent actions. Supporters of this submovement abroad have shown themselves to be substantially more willing to engage in violence. In recent decades insurrectional networks have carried out bomb attacks, arson, and bank robberies in various European countries.

*Climate action by left-wing activist groups in the Netherlands is in line with the tradition of acts of civil disobedience which are, however, non-violent and which activists hope will affect the political agenda*

For more information,  
go to: [aivd.nl/extremism](https://aivd.nl/extremism)

The anarchist scene in the Netherlands is involved in both long-term campaigns (for example the current Abolish Frontex campaign aimed at the migrants policy) and topical themes which have gained traction in society. Themes with regard to which activists are currently trying to raise their profile include the emergence of right-wing extremism, housing, and what they regard as police brutality. It is conceivable that they may take extremist action in relation to those themes in due course.

The same may also occur in relation to the climate theme, which became a more important issue for anarchists last year and which they view in the context of their fight against 'the capitalist authoritarian system'. Climate action by left-wing activist groups in the Netherlands is in line with the tradition of acts of civil disobedience which are, however, non-violent and which activists hope will affect the political agenda. The AIVD has no indications that these groups are radicalising.

But anarchists are much more radical than groups like these. They are opposed to what is the most prominent activist climate movement, Extinction Rebellion. Climate is also becoming an issue for anti-institutional extremists (for them the 'climate hoax' illustrates the detrimental role played by 'the elite') and to a lesser extent for right-wing extremists. This can lead to polarisation, with the various groups seeking to confront each other.

## > 1.5 Jihadist terrorism

- The AIVD considers the threat of attacks directed by ISIS to be higher than during the past few years.
- In the meantime the threat posed by the jihadist movement in the Netherlands has largely stayed the same.



**A Taliban fighter at a destroyed ISIS explosives depot in Afghanistan. The threat of attacks from networks directed by ISIS in Afghanistan has increased in 2022.**

CREDIT: EPA.

Global jihadism still constitutes the most significant terrorist threat against the Netherlands. The movement is made up of known terrorist organisations like al-Qaeda and ISIS and affiliated groups, networks and individual supporters across the globe, including in the Netherlands.

ISIS, and al-Qaeda as well, play an important role in the threat because of their efforts to inspire local supporters of jihadism or incite them to use violence. They also have the ambition to organise or direct large and complex attacks in the West.

Particularly in the second half of 2022 the AIVD saw an increase in intelligence relating to attack planning and possible ISIS operatives. For that reason the AIVD considers the threat of attacks in Europe directed by ISIS to be higher than in 2021. That threat comes predominantly from networks directed by ISIS structures in Afghanistan and to a lesser extent Syria.

ISIS came under pressure in 2022, for example from the anti-ISIS coalition, the loss of the caliph in Syria (twice), and the fight against the Taliban in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the organisation managed to maintain structures and set up new ones in order to carry out operations in the West. The AIVD works closely with partner services to combat the increased threat of an ISIS attack.

The AIVD believes it is doubtful that al-Qaeda has built up to the capacity to send operatives to carry out planned attacks in Europe. The threat to Europe from al-Qaeda affiliates also appears to be limited. Groups like Al Shabaab in Somalia and Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) in the Sahel have had sporadic regional successes, but they appear to be focusing primarily on regional conflicts.



*The arrest of a 20-year-old Syrian illustrates how real this threat still is. The man is suspected of preparing a terrorist crime.*

Al-Qaeda does not appear to have been able to capitalise on the Taliban's takeover of power in Afghanistan and months after the death (by an American drone) of their leader, Zawahiri, there has been no communication from the organisation regarding a replacement.

While the threat of ISIS-directed attacks has recently increased, 2022 was also the year with the fewest jihadist attacks in Europe since 2011. The number of attacks carried out by jihadists in Europe has been on the decline since 2017. The movement appears to have lost members in the Netherlands as well. The AIVD currently regards around five hundred people as being part of the jihadist movement in the Netherlands and more than one hundred adult Dutch nationals abroad (with the majority of them being based in Syria and Turkey).

What is more, the movement has disintegrated and is still made up of separate groups and lone actors who have different views on certain issues. In 2022 there was nothing to bridge those differences, for example the actions of charismatic leaders or a shared cause, or a mobilising issue such as a (new) foreign conflict area.

Although these are positive developments, the threat posed by the Dutch movement is still comparable with previous years. The vast majority of reports and leads received by the AIVD still relate to (possible) jihadism.

What is more, the fact that virtually no attacks have been carried out by groups in Europe in the past few years is partly because intelligence and security services have managed to investigate them and intervene on time. In recent years various jihadists inspired by ISIS have been prosecuted for their involvement in preparations for attacks in Europe, including in the Netherlands, as described in previous AIVD annual reports.

Attacks prepared by groups can often cause more damage than attacks by terrorists acting alone. However, the necessary communication between members of the group gives the security services more possibilities for discovery.

The level of activity, unity, and mobilisation of the movement as a whole does not always say something about the threat of violence of individual (clusters of) jihadists and particularly not as the movement becomes more fragmented. Since 2018 almost all jihadist attacks in Europe have actually been committed by perpetrators acting alone.

The arrest of a 20-year-old Syrian in the Netherlands last December illustrates how real this existing threat still is. This arrest was the result of an official report by the AIVD. The man is suspected of preparing a terrorist crime.

This case underlines the fragmented nature of the Dutch movement and the unpredictability of the threat. Lone actors in particular can suddenly take the step towards violence, if they believe the situation calls for it.

As announced in the 2021 annual report, the AIVD is also investigating the threat posed by jihadists who return to the Netherlands from areas of conflict in Syria and Iraq, as well as the threat posed by convicted jihadists who are in detention in the terrorist ward of the Custodial Institutions Agency. The AIVD has not observed either of these groups having any significant threat-increasing impact on the movement in the Netherlands in 2022.

However, there is a caveat. The AIVD continues to investigate jihadists who are reintegrating into society, due to their often higher threat profile. Other European countries also continue to be vigilant in this respect.

Although the pressure felt by the jihadist movement as a result of counterterrorism measures appears to be weakening the movement, at the same time awareness of how intelligence and security services and the (rest of the) criminal justice chain operate is growing within the movement. This may result in jihadists' activities becoming less visible.

Moreover, jihadism in the Netherlands has gone through periods of relative calm in the past, in particular between 2008 and 2012. The emergence of ISIS and the wars in Syria and Iraq then led to the movement's revival.

**For more information,  
go to: [aivd.nl/terrorisme](https://aivd.nl/terrorisme)**

## > 1.6

# Radical Islam

- **The threat posed by so-called Wahhabi Salafism to the democratic legal order in the Netherlands has declined.**
- **The majority of Wahhabi Salafists in the Netherlands reject the use of violence and some members of this group have adopted a more practical and tolerant course.**
- **Wahhabi Salafist teaching is not an automatic route to further radicalisation.**

During the past year the AIVD also investigated inciters of Wahhabi Salafism. Some of the ideas behind this fundamentalist branch of Islam are contrary to the democratic legal order. Although the group in the Netherlands is relatively small, its members have a disproportionate influence on the Islamic community in the Netherlands.

Wahhabi Salafist advocates believe in 'purifying' the creed and religious practices of Muslims of improper influences wherever possible. One element of the doctrine is to reject Muslims with other beliefs and non-believers, which can also mean rejecting Dutch society as a whole. This sometimes includes the constitution, the government, police, judges, and other democratic institutions. If a group with these ideas managed to attract a large number of supporters and gain influence, this could represent a danger to the continued existence of our democratic legal order.

***Although the group in the Netherlands is relatively small, its members have a disproportionate influence on the Islamic community in the Netherlands.***

During the past few years the AIVD identified two developments within the Dutch Wahhabi Salafist community which are relevant for the threat. First and foremost, the majority of Wahhabi Salafist advocates actively reject (the violence of) jihadism. Due to theological similarities the Wahhabi Salafist doctrine and teaching can still be regarded as a possible breeding ground for radicalisation towards jihadism, but this is certainly and evidently not the only route.

Secondly, some Wahhabi Salafists appear to have adopted a more pragmatic and tolerant attitude in recent years. This is reflected, for example, in the decline in the level of rejection or hatred of people with different beliefs, increased social participation, and the permitting, or even encouraging, of voting at elections.

Practising a pure form of Islam in a Western country like the Netherlands leads to a variety of practical problems, relating primarily to the behaviour Wahhabi Salafists should adopt within the Dutch society. It is impossible to prevent contact between them and what they consider to be the sinful outside world. More and more frequently leaders advocate a weighing up of the pros and cons of certain strict Wahhabi Salafist precepts. Sometimes they permit exceptions in order to increase the accessibility and practicability of their religion in Dutch society.

This development is also a result of the significant need to spread their message among Muslims with different beliefs and interested non-Muslims. The fact that this pragmatic approach is more accessible and easier to comply with means they can reach a large target group and frequently that group consists of young people.

The AIVD estimates that these changes are diminishing the threat to the democratic legal order. However, it remains to be seen whether this development continues.



*Some Wahhabi Salafists appear to have adopted a more pragmatic and tolerant attitude in recent years.*

For more information, go to:  
[aivd.nl/radicale-islam](https://aivd.nl/radicale-islam)

Some of the activists inciters continue to adhere to a strict, intolerant, and anti-democratic interpretation of the Wahhabi Salafist doctrine and they are also trying to reach, mould, and educate their supporters and target group, for example via informal education.

#### **Non-formal Wahhabi Salafist education**

Non-formal Wahhabi Salafist education is provided outside regular school hours, sometimes in mosques, but often in buildings intended specifically for that purpose. The AIVD is aware of approximately fifty Wahhabi Salafist non-formal teaching institutes where the teaching is likely to be at odds with the democratic legal order.

It is estimated that several thousand – sometimes very young – students are being taught in this way every year. From a national perspective this represents a very small minority of all Islamic centres in the Netherlands where non-formal education is provided.

It is not easy to determine the extent to which the education provided by these teaching institutes is undermining the democratic legal order. In general it can be said that the least extremist education is being taught to a larger audience of several hundred students per non-formal teaching institute, while the most extremist teaching is only being taught to several dozen students per institute.

#### **Foreign funding and interference**

The funding of the above-mentioned non-formal Wahhabi Salafist educational centres largely comes from the movement's own grassroots supporters. Islamic organisations in the Netherlands occasionally request funding from countries in the Gulf region, for example for a new Islamic centre, or in order to make the non-formal teaching more professional. This information was revealed by an AIVD investigation into foreign funding and undesirable interference. The amounts in question vary from several thousand to several million euros.

Sometimes the donors impose conditions. For example, a recipient of donations from the Gulf region may be expected to encourage the dissemination of Wahhabi Salafist beliefs, to promote the country of the donating party, or to accept far-reaching supervision by the donating party.

Wahhabi Salafist organisations primarily appear to request funding from like-minded organisations in the Gulf region. By doing so they could have a financial advantage compared to other Islamic organisations in the Netherlands, thereby increasing the reach of Wahhabi Salafist organisations. On the basis of the investigation in 2022 the AIVD's impression is that funding from the Gulf region has a limited national impact.

# 2

## International threats



The destruction caused by Russian troops in the Ukrainian city of Mariupol. CREDIT: SIPA USA.







## THEME STORY

- **Russia's invasion of Ukraine is more than a conflict between two countries.**
- **Ukraine is the military battlefield, but for Moscow the underlying fight is about how the world is governed.**
- **The AIVD and the MIVD investigate the totality of threats posed by Russia together.**

# Russia's invasion of Ukraine was a geopolitical shock to the system

'There is not one large country which ends where its territory ends.' That is the central theme in President Putin's geopolitical thinking: as a self-proclaimed superpower, Russia is demanding the right to shape the world order as it sees fit. Russia's tactics include engaging in military adventures, organising unprecedented domestic repression, hacking activities, eliminating its enemies, refusing to toe the line in international organisations, attempting to sow discord in the West, using gas supplies to blackmail the West, escalating its nuclear rhetoric, and attempting to change the international system for its own benefit in cooperation with China.

With the large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February, Russia unleashed the largest war on the European continent since the Second World War. By invading Ukraine, Putin has made it clear that Russia is prepared to use large-scale violence to change European and international relations to its advantage.

The invasion therefore signalled the start of more than just a military conflict between two countries. It suddenly accelerated developments which had long been ongoing around the world, changed the relationships between groups of countries, and may still influence how countries interact for a long time to come. In short, it turned out to be a geopolitical shock to the system.

Ukraine is the military battlefield, but for Moscow the underlying fight is about global geopolitical relationships. Moscow has regarded itself for years as being in an existential conflict with the West. Although Russia probably does not want to risk any overt military conflict with NATO, it is not afraid to use a wide arsenal of resources to cause damage to the West and improve its own position.

Moscow is, for example, using energy as a weapon to damage Western economies by deliberately limiting the supply of gas to Europe to create shortages on the markets leading to gas prices at record highs. As a result almost every European citizen is feeling the consequences of Putin's economic war against the West. By behaving in this way Russia hopes to undermine public support for the West's assistance to Ukraine.

Russia also uses information as a weapon against the West. The country claims that it is in an 'information war' with the West and uses, among other things, state media, Russian celebrities, influencers, websites, veterans, bloggers, and residents of the Donbas to reinforce its own narrative and place critics in a bad light.

Russian intelligence and security services and a wide range of (semi-)government officials are working behind the scenes to reinforce the Kremlin narrative.



***By invading Ukraine, Putin made it clear that Russia is prepared to use large-scale violence to change international relations to its advantage.***

**For more information, go to:**  
[aivd.nl/oekraine](https://aivd.nl/oekraine)

The Kremlin directs its information campaigns not only at its own population and the population of Ukraine, but also covertly looks to access European politics and influence European rulers and the media. Although Moscow does not specifically target the Netherlands in this respect, in the past year Moscow has sometimes engaged in far-reaching attempts to covertly influence the Western public debate on the invasion and the political-administrative system.

For Russia espionage is also a weapon in the fight. The Kremlin uses the intelligence and security services FSB, GRU, and SVR as an instrument to achieve goals at home and abroad. For example, Russia attempts to use espionage to discover how NATO and the EU take decisions so as to be able to undermine that decision-making. The AIVD and MIVD are continually working with international partners to counter this threat. In response to the Russian invasion European countries have, for example, declared more than 350 Russian intelligence officers to be *personae non gratae*. (You can read more about this on this page 27).

Lastly, Russia also uses cyberattacks. Although it does not do so on such a large scale as was expected during and shortly after the invasion, the digital domain has definitely turned out to be an important element of the war. Russia has used digital espionage to try, for example, to gain an insight into Ukrainian political and military decisions, Ukrainian troop movements, and communication between army units. Russia has also used digital espionage to try to identify Ukrainian army recruits. What is more, Russia appears to be more willing to use digital espionage against countries that support Ukraine. Against the backdrop of European gas shortages, Russia must therefore be regarded as a larger digital threat for the global energy sector.

The AIVD and the MIVD investigate the totality of threats posed by Russia together. The services are working to make potential targets of these Russian threats in the Netherlands more resilient, more specifically the Dutch political system. The services also intend to disrupt (digital) operations of the Russian intelligence and security services FSB, SVR and GRU in Russia and abroad in order to reduce their effectiveness. The AIVD regards the activities of these Russian services as a threat against the national security of the Netherlands and against Dutch interests abroad. In addition, the AIVD and MIVD provide the government and ministries with information in order to assess the threat posed by Russia and to enable the government to make suitable policy to combat it.

The socio-economic effects of the war may be contributing to social unrest in the Netherlands and the growth in anti-institutional extremism. It may also offer opportunities for international terrorism aimed against Europe. Potentially, those developments may be mutually reinforcing. The AIVD does not have any indications that (large) groups of Dutch nationals with an extremist ideology have travelled to Ukraine to participate in the war on either the Ukrainian, or the Russian side.

## > 2.1

# Espionage and interference in the Netherlands

- **Espionage and interference in the Netherlands were a considerable problem in 2022.**
- **In February the Netherlands expelled seventeen Russian intelligence officers.**
- **In April the AIVD prevented a Russian spy from using a cover identity to be able to work as an intern at the International Criminal Court.**
- **Several countries try to monitor (former) citizens in the Netherlands. It transpired that a number of countries have already been prepared to use deadly violence against exiled dissidents.**

Other countries engage in covert activities in the Netherlands which threaten our security and undermine our legal order. Depending on the activity, we refer to these as espionage, covert influencing, or undesirable interference. The AIVD tries to discover these activities on time in order to counteract them together with the appropriate bodies.

Any country that is covertly and unlawfully active in the Netherlands, is doing so for its own gain. Such countries will also have a number of specific goals and methods. In the first place, some countries try to access Dutch secrets, knowledge, and technology by engaging in what we would call espionage. Their aim is to gain a political, economic, or military advantage.

In the second place, there are countries, including Russia, that covertly try to undermine Western democracies and cooperation because they stand to benefit from the West becoming weaker. They may also try to weaken the social and political stability of the Netherlands. We refer to this as (covert) influencing.

Sometimes countries also try to influence the Dutch government covertly when it comes to taking (international) decisions, or they may try to give the Dutch population a more positive but incorrect picture of (actions by) their country. In doing so, they sometimes deliberately circulate disinformation (which should not be confused with public diplomacy or propaganda, which the AIVD does not investigate).

In the third place, there are countries which are secretly active in the Netherlands in order to keep an eye on their (former) citizens who live in the Netherlands as diaspora, and some of these countries have demonstrated that they do not always shy away from intimidation and violence in doing so. The result can be that migrants and Dutch nationals with a migrant background feel less free and safe in the Netherlands.

### The damage caused by espionage

Although it is usually not the most important goal of these countries to damage the Netherlands, the damage caused by espionage and interference can be substantial. Espionage therefore affects everyone in the Netherlands. Economic espionage, for example, can cause innovative knowledge and technology to disappear from the Netherlands.

Espionage and interference can undermine the unity of Western partnerships, such as the EU and NATO, and by doing so make the world a more dangerous place. Covert influencing can also (further) stir up unrest and polarisation in our society.

### A considerable problem

Espionage and interference in the Netherlands by other countries were a considerable problem in 2022. For that reason a number of countries, methods, and goals are dealt with separately in this annual report.

Russia and China are the greatest threat to the Netherlands' national security interests. For that reason we have included chapters on the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its impact on the threat to the Netherlands and its allies (page 24) and on the assertive role which China plays internationally (page 32). In these chapters attention is also paid to those countries' espionage activities.

Cyberespionage has the same goal as any other type of espionage. It is a specific, namely digital, method of spying. There are also specific (security) measures which can be used to combat cyberthreats and these are dealt with on page 29.

Espionage which endangers the economic security of the Netherlands is discussed on page 42, partly because it is such an urgent problem and because there are specific ways of making the Netherlands economically more resilient. That resilience, including against other threats, is discussed on page 35 and a clarification is given as to why a comprehensive approach is so important.

### Espionage

In 2022 various countries tried to steal secrets in the Netherlands in order to gain, for example, political advantage. This related not only to Dutch secrets held by government institutions, but also information about and held by organisations and alliances of which the Netherlands is a member, such as the EU and NATO. The Netherlands is then used as a springboard.

Russia in particular has tried to steal political information from the EU and NATO for years. In order to thwart physical espionage by Russia, European countries declared more than 350 Russian intelligence officers *personae non gratae* in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February. The Netherlands expelled seventeen intelligence officers who were working under diplomatic cover.

This illustrates the increased cooperation between European intelligence and security services in order to prevent espionage. The collaborating services not only coordinate the expulsion of spies, but also exchange data on intelligence officers they have identified so that they cannot cause harm anywhere else.

The expulsions were a serious setback for the Russian intelligence services and Russia will probably try to increase the number of intelligence officers working under the cover of the diplomatic service again.

In April the AIVD prevented an intelligence officer of the Russian GRU military intelligence service from being able to do an internship at the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague and from perhaps using that position to engage in espionage. The International Court is of interest to Russia because it is investigating possible Russian war crimes in Georgia and Ukraine.

The intelligence officer was using a Brazilian cover identity and had been trained for years. The AIVD identified him as a danger to national security, after which he was sent back to Brazil on the first available flight and was detained there.

### Covert influencing

Russia wants Western countries to start thinking more positively about the country and to take decisions which are more beneficial to Russia. The AIVD and other services see that the country is trying to achieve this openly and covertly.

Moscow wants to undermine the West's support for Ukraine and the sanctions against Russia and among its own population the regime wants to reinforce the image of the West as being the enemy.

### *The secret services of some countries speak with activists and threaten them.*

In order to achieve this, Russia attempts to undermine the political unity in and between Western countries by increasing and magnifying political and social polarisation. Russia appears to see the economic uncertainty and polarisation in the public debate in Europe as an opportunity to do this.

Although the covert influencing activities are primarily aimed at larger European countries, the fact that they affect our allies means they also affect Dutch interests. The consequences of Russian covert influencing abroad can therefore spread to the Netherlands.

Vigilance is moreover required because the Netherlands may also become a target of Russia if Moscow believes that it would benefit from this. One past example relates to the MH17 trial.

The AIVD also regards it to be a risk that Dutch people's faith in the government and institutions has declined and polarisation is increasing, because other countries may start to see more opportunities to interfere in Dutch politics or Dutch society.

#### **Interference in diaspora**

Countries like China, Russia and Iran engage in espionage in the Netherlands in order to keep an eye on or put pressure on communities or (former) citizens.

Countries with a large diaspora in the Netherlands, such as Morocco and Turkey, also engage in activities designed to influence or gain intelligence. Those activities may have all kinds of goals. Often they are intended to improve the relationship with the diaspora and use former compatriots to represent interests in the Netherlands. People can be rewarded for their cooperation, for example by being invited to events at the embassy, or with practical help with administrative matters.

However, people who speak out against injustices in certain countries may experience inconvenience and intimidation. They may, for example, find it more difficult to return to their country of origin, where they may still have family or possessions, or with which they feel a cultural and religious connection.

The intelligence activities carried out by other countries may also be intended to identify and silence (alleged) opponents and political dissidents. To this end the secret services of some countries speak with activists who have emigrated and threaten them, for example with violence or by making clear to them that their family members may be targeted. Some (alleged) activists may be arrested and prosecuted as soon as they travel to their country of origin and some countries are prepared to abduct and murder opponents abroad.

In 2022 a Pakistani in the United Kingdom was prosecuted for the (previous) planning of an assassination attempt on a Pakistani dissident living in the Netherlands. In the past Iran has enticed dissidents to another country, usually in the same region, in order to prosecute them in Iran once they have been extradited or abducted, and in some cases this has resulted in executions.

In authoritarian countries where there are heightened tensions there is also the risk of Dutch nationals (with dual nationality or otherwise) being detained under false pretences and then used as diplomatic 'pawns' in what has become known as *hostage diplomacy*.



## > 2.2 Cyber- threats

- **In 2022 we witnessed what was probably the first successful, state-sponsored cyberattack on the government networks of a NATO member state (Albania) for the purpose of sabotage.**
- **It underlines the massive threat now posed by countries with cyberattack programmes, such as China, Russia, and Iran.**
- **The AIVD has observed that cyberactors are continually changing their methods in order to remain undetected.**
- **Extra resources and possibilities enable the AIVD and MIVD to take more effective action against these threats.**

In 2022 the Netherlands continually had to deal with digital attacks carried out by countries with offensive cyberprogrammes which included not just Russia and China but also, for example, Iran and North Korea.

The associated risks are huge both for government, businesses and knowledge institutions and ultimately for the general public. Attacks can result in the theft of valuable and sensitive information, such as state and trade secrets, but also people's personal data.

In 2022, for example, the AIVD observed various countries with offensive cyberprogrammes trying to steal data from the (European) travel and aviation sector. The perpetrators were looking particularly for large data sets. Combining information from these data sets with other data helps them to identify, trace, or monitor people they have their eye on.

One particular danger of cyberattacks is that the attacker incorporates the capability of destroying vital infrastructure, such as energy and communication networks. Any interference with, or failure of, these networks can lead to social disruption and large-scale economic damage.

The urgency of the threat was underlined in 2022 by a cyberattack by a state-sponsored actor against Albania which was probably the first time that a state-sponsored actor had successfully attacked the government networks of a NATO member state, for the purposes of sabotage.

Albania and other NATO member states blame Iran for the attack and NATO acknowledged this in a declaration. In response to the attack Albania broke diplomatic ties with Iran. The United States moreover imposed additional sanctions against the Iranian intelligence and security service (MOIS).

In 2022 it was noticeable that countries tried to prevent the attacks from being discovered in a variety of ways. For example, they made greater use of commercial software which is also used extensively by security researchers and cybercriminals and which is not specifically traceable.

The AIVD also observed more frequent 'living-off-the-land attacks', whereby actors did not use specific malware, but rather the existing functionality of software often used for management and maintenance. Software like this is the ideal springboard because it is often accompanied by far-reaching user rights.

Actors also used anonymisation techniques to make it more difficult to trace the source of an attack by routing their own network traffic via an ever-changing infrastructure, which often consisted of a network of hacked servers specifically set up to carry out digital attacks.

The Dutch ICT infrastructure remains an attractive tool for state-sponsored actors to abuse, because it is of a high quality, is fast and stable and can be rented from a large number of providers.

In 2022 hackers employed by various states frequently managed to gain access to the networks of governments and companies by exploiting vulnerabilities in software which are not yet known to the public and which are known as zero days.

They also widely exploit known software vulnerabilities. Sometimes these are vulnerabilities which have just come to light and for which software suppliers have not yet issued a security update. State-sponsored actors appear to be able to exploit vulnerabilities like this within a matter of days. However, actors also exploit well-known vulnerabilities for which security updates are already available but which the victim has not yet installed.

The fact that thorough vulnerability patching by ICT departments can prevent a lot of damage was proven once again in 2022 in the case of an intergovernmental organisation. A state-sponsored actor tried to attack the networks of that organisation by exploiting a vulnerability in a popular software package. However, on the day that this vulnerability became public knowledge the ICT department disconnected the application in question from the Internet in order to implement the necessary security measures. The state-sponsored actor then tried in vain over a number of days to establish a connection with the organisation.

### *The attackers often used attachments which appeared to be documents relating to news events, such as the conflict in Ukraine.*

In 2022 digital attacks were still often initiated by means of spearphishing. This is a tried and tested method whereby a person is enticed to open an (infected) attachment or link in an email. In order to increase their chance of success the attackers often used attachments which appeared to be documents relating to news events, such as the conflict in Ukraine or COVID.

Another known method which hackers frequently used in 2022 to access digital networks was a supply chain attack, which is an attack carried out via trusted suppliers, digital service providers, or commonly used software to enable the attacker to penetrate deep into victims' networks. Supply chain attacks can potentially cause considerable collateral damage if an entire client base is affected or exposed to attacks via the software or service provider used.

In order to protect the Netherlands against cyberthreats, the AIVD and MIVD must (be able to) invest in the modern resources required and the right people to use them. The extra resources which the services structurally receive on an annual basis were primarily used to reinforce cybercapacities during the past year.

What is more, the services now have the option to carry out cable interception. In theory, that option has been available for years, given that it was the most important new feature of the Security and Intelligence Services Act (Wet op de inlichtingen- en veiligheidsdiensten, Wiv 2017). However, in practice it turned out to be technically and legally complicated.

***Commonly used software enables the attacker to penetrate deep into victims' networks.***

**The AIVD advises government organisations on their digital security and is increasingly being approached to do the same by other organisations that run a significant risk of becoming the target of attacks from other countries.**

**For more information, go to:**  
[aivd.nl/cyberdreiging](https://aivd.nl/cyberdreiging)

**Alternatively, you can listen to the second season of the podcast entitled *De Dienst* (at [aivd.nl/podcast](https://aivd.nl/podcast)) which explains how the AIVD investigates a cyberthreat.**

More than anything it continued to be unclear how the so-called targeting requirement referred to in the law would work in the context of cable interception. The ministers involved and the Investigatory Powers Commission (Toetsingscommissie Inzet Bevoegdheden, TIB) had differing opinions on this matter.

It was only in 2022 that the services were able to use cable interception when investigating cyberthreats. Being able to watch (international) digital traffic flow on a specific cable is extremely helpful when it comes to gaining an insight into the attack structures of state-sponsored actors and it also helps identify possible (cyber)threats at an early stage.

The legal basis for cable interception work has been clarified in the proposal for the Temporary Cyber Operations Act (Tijdelijke wet cyberoperaties) that the Ministers of the Interior and Kingdom Relations and Defence submitted to the Dutch House of Representatives in December 2022.

That bill also makes it easier for the services to monitor cyberattackers at the speed and with the agility necessary, for example by setting up so-called dynamic monitoring. If the bill becomes law, the services will be able to act much more effectively against cyberthreats from countries such as China, Russia, and Iran.

The AIVD advises government organisations on their digital security and is increasingly being approached to do the same by other organisations that run a significant risk of becoming the target of attacks from other countries. The AIVD's aim is also to advise organisations in vital sectors which are extremely important for the Netherlands.

In 2022 the AIVD issued cybersecurity advice based on its own intelligence on ten occasions to (mainly) government organisations to give them a technical perspective for action against digital attacks from other countries. This year the advice concerned, for example, what organisations can do in order to mitigate the risks of using mobile telephony and how they can defend themselves more effectively against specific phishing attacks. In 2023 the AIVD wants to provide more cybersecurity advice, including to organisations in vital sectors. To do this, the service will continue expanding its advisory capacity and investments will be made in the development of security products for vital sectors.

The AIVD also helped write the Dutch Cybersecurity Strategy 2022-2028, as published by the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid, NCTV). The Strategy describes what the central government wants to do in the coming six years in the field of cybersecurity and is accompanied by action plans which specify how various government organisations are going to increase the country's cybersecurity.

The AIVD is contributing by, for example, increasing its capacity for cyberinvestigations, by developing or helping to develop safe digital products and services, and by reinforcing the digital resilience of the government and vital and private sectors.

## THEME STORY

- China is a key trading partner of the Netherlands. At the same time it represents the greatest threat to the Netherlands' economic security.
- The country uses any means it considers necessary to achieve its long-term economic goals, and this includes espionage and theft (of knowledge).
- In 2022 this approach was influenced by domestic and global events.
- Last year AIVD and MIVD investigations contributed to the Dutch government's insight into undesirable activities by China and the instruments which can be used in response.



The five-year National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The re-election of Xi Jinping will probably mean a continuation of China's foreign policy and geopolitical stance. CREDIT: ANP.

## The two faces of China on the world stage

China's global position is important for the Netherlands from both an economic and a (geo)political perspective and it is a key trading partner. At the same time the country can be regarded as a 'system rival'. Under Xi Jinping the emphasis has been placed increasingly on an anti-West attitude and on a Communist ideology with Chinese characteristics, which must also be promoted in the country's foreign policy.

This more ideological geopolitical attitude on the part of China is often at odds with the international order based on Western values. China is challenging that order and is trying to replace it with a world order led by the country itself.

The five-year National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took place in 2022 and re-elected Xi Jinping as general secretary of the CCP and President of China. The re-election means a continuation of China's foreign policy and geopolitical stance.

In the context of China becoming increasingly stronger and assertive, the AIVD and the MIVD are investigating China's foreign, defence, and security policies and any relevant developments. The AIVD and the MIVD are also investigating the threat posed by this Chinese policy to the Netherlands and Dutch interests. This will produce a more complete and balanced picture of Chinese intentions towards other countries and will enable Dutch ministries to conduct a balanced China policy.



China often teams up with Russia in joint competition with the West. Both countries are trying to drive a wedge between the US and Europe and undermine the West's credibility in the eyes of other countries. China is doing that by working on a multi-lateral system which is, however, based on its own design and subject to its own conditions.

***China is striving to achieve a number of economic goals which are closely related to military goals and which are laid down in multi-year plans.***

For that reason the country has, in recent years, set up a number of parallel international institutions according to its own vision, such as the Global Development Initiative (GDI) and the Global Security Initiative (GSI). It is also trying to increase the influence of existing partnerships such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Above all, China regards the United States as a competitor, including in the field of technology. Both countries want to be leaders when it comes to developing new technologies (which can partially be used for military purposes).

China is striving to achieve a number of economic goals which are closely related to military goals and which are laid down in multi-year plans. To start with the country wants to be self-sufficient and technologically independent from other countries in due course. In addition, the country wants to have 'world-class' armed forces which are as good as those of any other country by 2049 at the latest.

This requires strong economic growth and the development of high-end technologies, in particular key technologies such as semi-conductor, artificial intelligence, and quantum technologies. China is actively looking for this kind of knowledge and technology in other countries, particularly in the West.

In this respect the Netherlands is a target because it has a good international reputation in the field of high-end technology. From the Dutch perspective China is a key trading partner and Chinese companies and knowledge institutions can sometimes be valuable partners for Dutch institutions. At the same time the country represents the greatest threat to the Netherlands' economic security.

China uses legitimate investments, company takeovers, and academic cooperation, as well as illegitimate (digital) espionage, insiders, covert investments, and illegal exports to target Dutch companies, knowledge institutions, and scientists on a regular basis.

***Many Dutch companies and knowledge institutions find it difficult to properly assess the risks and benefits of economic and scientific cooperation with China.***

In doing so China uses any means it considers necessary (the so-called whole-of-society approach), ranging from (state-owned) companies, universities, the army, government bodies, the intelligence and security services to Chinese students and employees who are residing in the Netherlands.

That represents a threat to the knowledge security of Dutch educational and research institutions, the capacity of companies to innovate and earn money, and the effectiveness of the armed forces. It may also cause the Netherlands to become strategically dependent, for example in terms of our vital infrastructure. Furthermore, Dutch technology which has been designed for peaceful purposes could easily be used for suppression or warfare.

Many Dutch companies and knowledge institutions find it difficult to properly assess the risks and benefits of economic and scientific cooperation with China. China often tries to disguise the behind-the-scenes involvement of its government or army in such cooperation and often the disadvantages of cooperating with China only become visible in the longer term.

The investigation being carried out by the AIVD and MIVD into the covert (economic) activities of China in the Netherlands adds to the instruments which the Dutch government can use to respond, such as the investment assessment, the yet to be implemented knowledge security assessment framework, the controlling of exports of dual-use and military goods, and the general security requirements for military assignments (*Algemene Beveiligingseisen voor Defensieopdrachten, ABDO*).

The AIVD and MIVD are also working to make (defence) companies and knowledge institutions more aware of the risks of espionage and the undesirable transfer of knowledge, often in partnership with the ministries concerned. That work enables companies and institutions to carry out a thorough risk assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of cooperation with China.

## > 2.3 Economic security

- Last year it became clear how the actions of some countries (could) represent a threat for the Dutch economy.
- The risk of the dependence on other countries for matters such as gas and oil became particularly obvious.
- The AIVD is taking steps with its partners to keep the unique knowledge of Dutch institutions safe.

The AIVD is investigating the covert actions of other countries which may threaten the economic security of the Netherlands. The country has had to deal with this problem more frequently and more explicitly in recent years.

The associated risks are considerable. For example, economic espionage may cause innovative knowledge and technology to disappear from the Netherlands, and with that the capacity of companies to earn money and keep people in work.

In November 2022 the AIVD, together with the MIVD and the NCTV, published the second 'Threat Assessment State-sponsored Actors' which described, for example, three specific and topical dangers for the Dutch economy resulting from the actions of other countries.

In the first place, other countries may endanger vital sectors in the Netherlands, such as its telecommunications infrastructure, energy sector, or the Port of Rotterdam, which may become the target of an undesirably large influence by other countries through (covert) takeovers and investments.

In the second place, the Netherlands is dependent on other countries for some strategic resources. For example, the global technology sector is dependent on rare earth elements which currently come primarily from China, and Europe is dependent on Russian gas. The risk of those strategic dependencies became more apparent last year. Excessive dependence on a single supplier creates vulnerabilities and opportunities for abuse for political reasons.

In the third place, Dutch companies, knowledge institutions and scientists have been the target of actors in other countries who want to acquire their high-end knowledge or technology, either through (cyber)espionage or (academic) cooperation. Countries also try to use them to circumvent export restrictions and sanctions. China represents the largest threat to Dutch knowledge security.

***Dutch companies, knowledge institutions and scientists have been the target of actors in other countries who want to acquire their high-end knowledge or technology.***

At the same time international cooperation is essential for Dutch knowledge institutions. Their excellent academic reputation and leading position is partly down to the open attitude towards the world and to the academic freedom that exists in the Netherlands. More generally, international, economic cooperation provides the Netherlands with access to high-quality knowledge, raw materials, highly trained staff, sales markets, and funding.

***In 2022 the AIVD intensified its cooperation with the MIVD in the field of economic security.***

**For more information, go to: [aivd.nl/economische-veiligheid](https://aivd.nl/economische-veiligheid)**

Keeping Dutch knowledge safe requires an approach that does not jeopardise this. For that reason the AIVD was involved in setting up the National Contact Point for Knowledge Security (*Loket Kennisveiligheid*) which was officially opened by the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (*Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland, RVO*) in January 2022 and it continues to contribute to it in terms of content.

The AIVD is also involved in the Business Advice Centre for Economic Security (*Ondernemersloket Economische Veiligheid*), which is currently being set up. In due course this will provide companies with a single point of contact within government which they can contact if they have any issues relating to economic security, for example regarding the risks of cooperating with countries such as China (see page 33).

The desk is operated by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy. You can find more information about both these initiatives and about how the AIVD is helping to increase the resilience of the government and leading business sectors against economic espionage on page [42].

In 2022 the AIVD also intensified its cooperation with the MIVD in the field of economic security. Both services are now contributing to this on the basis of their legal duties. Various teams from the AIVD and the MIVD are working closely together to ensure that the Dutch government, the (defence) industry, vital infrastructure, and knowledge institutions can do more to combat undesirable strategic dependencies and transfers of knowledge and technology. That provides these sectors with perspective for action so that they can take countermeasures. This makes the government, vital companies, and knowledge institutions more resilient.

## &gt; 2.4

## Political information

- **In a world which is more connected but which is also experiencing more conflict, the government had to make choices in 2022 to make the Netherlands safer. It was helped in this endeavour by AIVD investigations into the hidden intentions and plans of certain countries.**

The Dutch government wants to establish its own access to information in order to understand events that are happening around the world which may threaten or harm the Netherlands and how such threats might be stopped or prevented.

In this respect the AIVD and the MIVD play a unique role, because if countries or foreign organisations have secret plans which may harm the Netherlands, the services can reveal those hidden agendas. At the government's request the AIVD and the MIVD therefore collect and analyse information about events which affect Dutch interests.

These events may be visible and drastic, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, they may also be subtle changes to the stability of the region or a new course adopted by a country. The ambitions and actions of other countries or of foreign organisations may also (directly or indirectly) lead to shortages and price increases, or damage our economy. The risk of this increases as countries become more connected economically and digitally, more frequently enter into alliances, but also compete more openly with each other.

Intelligence helps the Netherlands to take decisions more independently. It is precisely when engaging in important negotiations and developing international policy that you do not want to be dependent on information from other countries, but instead be able to weigh up your options on the basis of independent analysis. That also prevents you from being misled. After all, conflicts are also fought using (dis)information and intelligence.

A good insight into developments in certain countries and the positions of (in particular) governments also gives the Netherlands a stronger starting position in international consultations and helps to make and refine policy using specific knowledge.

Lastly, (political) intelligence helps with choices to make the Netherlands safer, for example the implementation of measures to improve the security of the country's digital infrastructure.

### The Integrated Order

Decisions regarding which countries should be investigated are taken by the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, the Minister of Defence, and the Prime Minister in his role of Minister of General Affairs. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Justice and Security, Economic Affairs, and Education, Culture and Science are also intensively involved. The choice of countries is recorded in the so-called Integrated Security and Intelligence Order (Geïntegreerde Aanwijzing Inlichtingen en Veiligheid, GA).

In 2022 a revised Integrated Order was drawn up for the 2023-2026 period. This was the product of close cooperation between the AIVD, the MIVD and the various government ministries involved. The 2023-2026 Integrated Order serves as the guideline for the services' intelligence investigations. The precise countries investigated by the AIVD in 2022 is a secret.



# 3

## Helping to prevent or eliminate threats



North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un (r) walking with his presumed daughter (l) as he inspects a new intercontinental ballistic missile. CREDIT: KCNA.



## > 3.1 Counter- proliferation

- Last year North Korea launched more ballistic missiles than in any other year.
- Iran also proceeded with its nuclear programme.
- In a few instances the AIVD and MIVD managed to prevent Russia and Iran from taking knowledge or technology from the Netherlands to use in their nuclear weapons programmes.

The Counterproliferation Unit (UCP) of the AIVD and the MIVD investigates whether countries which may constitute a threat for (inter)national security – so-called countries of concern – have, or are developing, weapons of mass destruction.

This includes investigating biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons programmes and weapon systems which can transport weapons of mass destruction, such as ballistic missiles.

The investigation is intended to ascertain the intentions and technical capabilities of countries of concern. The UCP also wants to avoid the Netherlands unintentionally contributing to their weapons programmes by exporting relevant materials, technology, or scientific knowledge. This contributes to making the Netherlands and the world a safer place and it is directly helping to protect the international legal order.

***Kim Jong-un, the leader of North Korea, had previously said that he wanted the country's military doctrine to place more emphasis on tactical nuclear weapons.***

In 2022 North Korea continued to develop its nuclear programme. Last year the country launched more ballistic missiles than in any other year and claimed that some of these launches were exercises by tactical nuclear weapons units.

Kim Jong-un, the leader of North Korea, had previously said that he wanted the country's military doctrine to place more emphasis on tactical nuclear weapons. He also said that he wanted to work on developing a super large hydrogen bomb. At the end of November he declared that he wanted to turn North Korea into the 'world's most powerful nuclear force'. It is generally assumed that a new nuclear test is going to be carried out soon.

Iran also continued with its nuclear programme last year. The country is continuing to build up stocks of 20% and 60% enriched uranium. That uranium can be further enriched to 90%, as required for a nuclear weapon, by using centrifuges.

Iran is continuing to distance itself from the agreements made within the framework of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and is using increasingly advanced uranium enrichment centrifuges to increase its enrichment capacity. This is making a first nuclear test more and more of a possibility.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) also presented a number of new missiles in 2022, including the medium range ballistic missile which they have named Kheibar Shekan (or 'Fortress Destroyer'). They also continued to develop their military space programme. For example, in March 2022, the IRGC launched the Qased space launch vehicle (SLV). It was used to put the Nour-2 satellite into orbit around the Earth. In November the IRGC launched a new SLV which have called Ghaem-100.

*The investigation also looked at the generals in the Syrian regime who are responsible for toxic gas attacks.*

For more information,  
go to: [aivd.nl/  
massavernietigingswapens](https://aivd.nl/massavernietigingswapens)

The technology used in these programmes can be used to develop missiles with an intercontinental range, which may represent a threat for Europe and for the Netherlands.

In 2022 the Counterproliferation Unit continued its investigation into the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Although the focus was on the current situation, the investigation also looked at the generals in the Syrian regime who are responsible for previous toxic gas attacks. In 2022 the unit also continued its investigation into the biological weapons programmes of various countries of concern, including Russia and Iran. The focus was also on recent developments in biotechnology and the possible consequences thereof for the development of new types of biological weapons.

In 2022 the unit managed, in some instances, to prevent Russia and Iran securing materials, technology, and (applied) scientific knowledge from the Netherlands which they could have used for their nuclear programmes. These included high-tech goods which play an important role in the modernisation of weapons of mass destruction. The AIVD issued several official reports on the matter to the government and financial institutions.

Financial institutions have a role to play because Russia and other countries of concern are devising more and more complex constructions to circumvent export checks and sanctions. To that end they set up, for example, front companies in European countries and come up with financial constructions to hide the source of the funding.

Iran is known to have access to advanced theoretical knowledge of nuclear technology. However, as a consequence of sanctions Iran is finding it difficult to carry out experimental research. Iranian researchers and students come to the West to gain practical knowledge and skills and they do so at technical universities in the Netherlands as well. In 2022 the UCP's efforts prevented an Iranian scientist, who was affiliated to a sanctioned institute, from being able to acquire relevant (applied) knowledge from a Dutch technical university. That knowledge could have been used in Iran's nuclear weapons programme. Whenever necessary the AIVD also investigates new developments in the field of weapons of mass destruction.



## THEME STORY

- How effectively the Netherlands can respond to threats depends on the dedication of many different parties.
- The AIVD provides intelligence and advice which enhances the resilience of, for example, ministries, businesses, and universities.
- It also helps central government protect state secrets.

# Resilience requires an integrated approach

Previous chapters described how threats against the Netherlands are, or may be, linked together, or influence each other. That makes it even more necessary than ever to ensure that countermeasures taken by the Netherlands are also interlinked and that an active and largely comprehensive approach to resilience is taken, with the involvement of all the relevant parties. With this in mind the AIVD will continue to invest even more in resilience over the next four years.

The AIVD combats threats against the Netherlands by cooperating first and foremost at international level with other (generally Western) countries and services that are dealing with the same sort of state-sponsored threats. The most visible example of this was the joint action taken against Russian aggression in Ukraine in 2022. You can read more about that on page 24.

Another example is the contribution the AIVD made last year to the digital resilience of EU institutions. The AIVD is also closely involved in new EU regulations and directives to make Europe safer from a digital perspective. These include the Information Security Regulation, the Cybersecurity Regulation, the Network and Information Systems Directive and the Cyber Resilience Act.

Within the Netherlands the AIVD (together with the Ministry of Defence and the MIVD) also supervises the security of all EU, ESA, and NATO classified information. You can read more about the cyberthreats against the Netherlands on page 29.

In the second place, resilience also requires a coordinated approach within the Dutch government and between the government and society, for example in order to counteract any undesirable transfer of knowledge to China and other countries.

The AIVD contributed to this goal in various ways in 2022, for instance by being involved in the initiative by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science to introduce screening for certain people who wanted to come to the Netherlands in order to engage in studies in a sensitive specialist field.

The AIVD and the MIVD were also two of the parties involved in the new government-wide National Contact Point for Knowledge Security (Loket Kennisveiligheid) which was opened in January 2022 in order to help Dutch knowledge institutions with any security issues they were struggling with.

Dutch universities and knowledge institutions are attractive targets for countries that are looking for high-quality technological knowledge and that is causing a rise in demand for information from the Contact Point for Knowledge Security. Because the Contact Point for Knowledge Security is performing well, it has become a blueprint for the Business Advice Centre for Economic Security, which is being set up with the intention of helping businesses that are being confronted with economic security risks, for example in the form of espionage by other countries.

Previously, there was no single point of contact within the government for companies to contact. As such, all relevant government parties have decided to establish one.



***Most visible was  
the concerted  
action against the  
Russian aggression  
in Ukraine.***

The Contact Point for Knowledge Security is, for example, intended to help knowledge-intensive SMEs that have attracted the attention of other countries with questions about cooperation with businesses and people outside the European Union, export controls, foreign trips, and personnel policy. Their involvement can make an important contribution to the resilience of such companies against economic espionage.

Two specific AIVD tasks which help to make the government and business community resilient are the AIVD's task to carry out system checks and the work that the AIVD performs to protect Dutch state secrets.

The AIVD's task to carry out system checks entails that an organisation can ask the AIVD to carry out a check regarding a person or body in the interest of the national security. In other words a check to see whether the AIVD systems contain information about a person or body which show a threat to national security. That is not the same as an AIVD investigation, and such checks are subject to clear rules.

The law stipulates that the AIVD can also carry out checks in order to protect the economic security of the Netherlands. For example, the Dutch government can ask the AIVD to carry out a check into companies which, for example, want to carry out takeovers, investments, or mergers which may be detrimental to national security.

One example of this is The Ministry of Economic Affairs, for example, may submit requests for checks on the grounds of the Electricity Act 1998 (Elektriciteitswet 1998), the Telecommunications Act (Telecommunicatiewet), and the Gas Act (Gaswet). The AIVD expects that it will perform more checks for the ministry in 2023 as soon as the Investments, Mergers and Acquisitions Security Screening Act (Wet veiligheidstoets investeringen, fusies en overnames, Vifo) comes into effect. The AIVD is organising its work process accordingly in preparation for this.

Last year the central government, including the AIVD, also made progress with regard to the National Cryptostrategy (NCS), which describes how the government can ensure that reliable information security products remain available for very sensitive information. This protects Dutch secrets. The AIVD plays an important role in helping to develop and evaluate these products which are produced by specialist companies.

The NCS featured in the 2022 Coalition Agreement. This is important to also guarantee the protection of state secrets in the longer term. The expectation is that the first information security products developed within the framework of the strategy will become available to the central government in 2023.

Lastly, a comprehensive approach to resilience also requires broad social awareness of the economic threats against the Netherlands. That is something the AIVD and its partners contributed to as well in 2022 by providing intelligence and technical expertise to the government, by engaging with vital and leading sectors, as well as by making companies and citizens more aware of the existence of economic espionage and its consequences. This is done, for example, via publications like the Threat Assessment State-sponsored Actors, which was produced with the MIVD and the NCTV. Other examples include generally available publications which the AIVD is expecting to publish in 2023.

**For more information, go to:  
[aivd.nl/weerbaarheid](https://aivd.nl/weerbaarheid)**

## > 3.2

# The AIVD's role in the Dutch Safety and Security System

- In 2022 the AIVD observed significant threats against Dutch politicians, particularly from anti-institutional extremists.
- The AIVD contributes to the system used to monitor the security of, among others, politicians and members of the Royal Household by providing intelligence and analyses.

For more information,  
go to: [aivd.nl/  
bewakenenbeveiligen](https://aivd.nl/bewakenenbeveiligen)

The AIVD's so-called 'threat reports' support the safety and security system which ensures that, among others, politicians, government figures and diplomatic premises are guarded and protected. The NCTV takes decisions partly on the basis of the AIVD's risk analyses, threat analyses and threat assessments as to whether such dignitaries, objects or organisations need (extra) security in order to do their work without being impeded.

Just as in recent years the AIVD was also aware in 2022 of significant threats against Dutch politicians, particularly from anti-institutional extremists.

*The AIVD also compiled threat analyses for the MH17 trial, diplomatic premises and diplomats, international organisations, and for national events such as King's Day, National Remembrance Day, Veterans' Day and the state opening of parliament.*

In 2022 the AIVD drew up, among other things, threat assessments for working visits by government officials and Members of Parliament. The AIVD also compiled threat analyses for the MH17 trial, diplomatic premises and diplomats, international organisations, and for national events such as King's Day, National Remembrance Day, Veterans' Day and the state opening of parliament.

## > 3.3

# Security screenings

- In 2022, the Security Screening Unit (*Unit Veiligheidsonderzoeken, UVO*) and other mandated parties carried out 71,343 screenings into (prospective) officials in positions involving confidentiality. This is an increase of 19,989 compared to 2021.
- In 2022, the UVO completed an average of 92.9 percent of its screenings within the legal term of eight weeks.
- Halfway through 2022 the bill to amend the Security Screening Act (*Wet Veiligheidsonderzoeken, Wvo*) was submitted for consultation.
- On 1 February 2023, it was decided, on the basis of proper consultation, that the National Police Force will no longer be a mandated party.

The AIVD and MIVD carry out security screenings into (prospective) officials in positions involving confidentiality: these are persons who, in their work, have access to classified information, or are in a position in which they could harm national security. Examples are people working for the central government, the Ministry of Defence, civil aviation, and companies responsible for vital processes.

The work is performed by a joint unit. In 2022 the Security Screening Unit UVO took 71,343 decisions on whether or not to issue a certificate of no objection (*Verklaring van Geen Bezwaar, VGB*).

Of the total number of screenings in 2022, 30,282 were carried out by the UVO itself (14,934 by the MIVD and 15,348 by the AIVD) and 41,061 were carried out by the National Police and the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee (KMar) under AIVD mandate.

The UVO was confronted with an unexpected high demand for security screenings due to the significant increase in the number of people in positions involving confidentiality in, among others, the aviation sector and central government in the Netherlands. At the same time the AIVD was not always able to recruit new staff quickly enough due to shortages on the labour market. The onboarding of new employees also takes time. For that reason the UVO had to cope with higher backlogs and longer turnaround times than normal. This unfortunately meant that it took longer to issue security screenings results.

***The demand for security clearances was high because the number of people in positions of trust in the aviation sector, among others, increased sharply.***

The UVO strives to create an optimal and uniform work process for its security screenings. This will increasingly allow the AIVD and MIVD to carry out their security screenings in the same way and also enable them to deploy staff in the best and most flexible way to carry out security screenings for both services. In 2022 the UVO also improved its services by investing in a client contact centre.

The Modernising Security Screenings (*Modernisering Veiligheidsonderzoeken, MVO*) programme was also expanded in 2022 to help speed up the application process thanks to automated elements and adjusted processes. One notable milestone was when the Automatic Alert System went live. This is a system which informs the UVO of any changes in the Criminal Records System in relation to someone working in a position involving confidentiality in civil aviation, or if there is new intelligence on them which may lead to the certificate of no objection being withdrawn. Where necessary the UVO then carries out a new security screening to maintain safety in the civil aviation sector. In due course the Automatic Alert System will also be used in conjunction with other security screenings.

## UVO policy developments

### Security Screening Bill

In mid 2022 the bill to amend the Security Screening Act (*Wet Veiligheidsonderzoeken, Wvo*) was submitted for Internet consultation. The AIVD also performed an implementation test which provided an insight into the consequences of the bill for the UVO and for citizens, companies, and relevant ministers. The conclusions were incorporated into the bill.

### Termination of the mandate of the National Police Force

The new Police Act (*Politiewet*) came into effect on 1 January 2023 and gives the police the authority to screen its own employees (under the Act on the screening of police officers and external police staff or *Wet screening politieambtenaren en police-externen*). Specifically this means that the National Police Force itself is going to carry out 'integrity screenings' for a large proportion of its current staff in positions involving confidentiality, while the UVO will do the same for staff in remaining positions involving confidentiality. It is partly because of this that it was decided, on the basis of proper consultation, to terminate the mandate given by the AIVD to the National Police Force per 1 February 2023.

## *In consultation with the AIVD the National Police Force also drew up new grounds for the designation of positions involving confidentiality within the police.*

In 2022 the cooperation between the AIVD and the National Police Force revolved around preparing the termination of the mandate and the organisation of a new approach to carrying out security screenings. In consultation with the AIVD the National Police Force also drew up new grounds for the designation of positions involving confidentiality within the police.

### Security screening figures

There are three categories of security screenings, depending on the nature of the position involving confidentiality, namely the A, B, or C screening. The more damage a (prospective) official in a position involving confidentiality could cause to national security, the more in-depth the screening. An A screening is the most in-depth screening and is only carried out for the most vulnerable positions involving confidentiality. When a screening results in a positive decision, the applicant receives a so-called certificate of no objection (*Verklaring van Geen Bezwaar, VGB*).

In 2022, the UVO completed an average of 92.9 percent of its screenings within the legal term of eight weeks. By doing so the UVO met the set target of 90 percent or more for the punctual issuing of certificates of no objection.

Table 1  
Key figures relating to security screenings (including mandated parties)

SCREENINGS	POSITIVE DECISIONS	NEGATIVE DECISIONS	TOTAL NUMBER OF DECISIONS
LEVEL A, BY UVO	5,105	10	5,115
LEVEL B, BY UVO	15,504	59	15,563
LEVEL B, TAKEN OVER BY UVO FROM KMAR AND NATIONAL POLICE	5,100	665	5,765
LEVEL C, BY UVO	3,819	20	3,839
TOTAL SCREENINGS BY UVO	29,528	754	30,282
LEVEL B, TAKEN OVER BY KMAR AND NATIONAL POLICE	41,061	0*	41,061
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF SCREENINGS</b>	<b>70,589</b>	<b>754</b>	<b>71,343</b>

\* The National Police and KMar do not issue negative decisions themselves. In case of doubt regarding a Level B security screening, the investigation is handed over to the UVO. Negative decisions are added to the number of negative decisions made by the AIVD. This explains why the figure here is 0.

Table 2  
Results of objections and appeals against security screening decisions

	OBJECTIONS RECEIVED	RULING ON OBJECTION	RULING ON APPEAL	RULING ON SECOND APPEAL
UNFOUNDED	N/A	15	4	0
WELL-FOUNDED	N/A	5	0	0
INADMISSIBLE	N/A	0	0	0
WITHDRAWN	N/A	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>

\* Of the 39 notices of objection, 11 came from KLM. These notices of objection relate to the amount of the security screening fees and their consideration was postponed, with mutual consent, until the Council of State has issued a judgement on appeal with regard to this issue.

For more information  
go to: [aivd.nl/  
veiligheidsonderzoeken](https://aivd.nl/veiligheidsonderzoeken)



# 4

## Organisation and key figures







Erik Akerboom, Director General AIVD (right), in conversation with Pieter-Jaap Aalbersberg (centre) and general Jan Swillens (left). The AIVD has always cooperated closely with the NCTV and MIVD. CREDIT: ANP.

## THEME STORY

- While threats against the Netherlands are becoming more diverse, the AIVD is also starting to collaborate more with other parties.
- The AIVD has always cooperated closely with, for example, the MIVD, NCTV, other services, the police, and public prosecution service, but now it is also looking to work with additional partners in education, science and the business community.

# Working together to make the Netherlands a safer place

As threats against the Netherlands increase in number or diversity, the AIVD is broadening the scope of its cooperation with organisations which can take action against those threats. Cooperation is an essential element of the AIVD's work. It is the unique task of the service(s) to gather intelligence on the basis of which others can take action in order to make the Netherlands a safer place.

In 2022 the AIVD cooperated closely with other Western services, particularly in relation to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. European intelligence and security services already work closely together, for example in order to prevent espionage and attacks. They coordinate the expulsion of spies and also exchange data on intelligence officers they have identified so that they cannot cause harm anywhere else.

The organisation that the AIVD collaborates with most intensively is the MIVD. This collaboration is both logical and necessary because the Netherlands has dealings on the world stage with countries which sometimes use a broad spectrum of resources, from military threats to espionage and influencing.

The law therefore prescribes that, although they have their own tasks, the two Dutch services cooperate as much as possible. The Ministers of General Affairs, Interior and Kingdom Relations, and Defence determine which matters need to be investigated jointly by the AIVD and the MIVD.

For example, the AIVD and the MIVD collaborate on identifying and counteracting the threat posed by Russia and China and they share joint teams that are involved in security screenings, counterproliferation and cyberoperations. Those teams operate from the premises of both services.

***Official reports submitted to the Public Prosecution Service resulted in the arrest of a man suspected of preparing a terrorist attack.***

***The AIVD and its partners also provide public information, partially in order to raise the public's awareness of the risks of economic espionage and the dangers of extremism and terrorism.***

For more information go to:  
[aivd.nl/weerbaarheid](https://aivd.nl/weerbaarheid)

In 2022 the AIVD also established contacts with trusted partners in the criminal justice chain in order to avert threats of terrorist violence. Last year, official reports submitted to the Public Prosecution Service resulted in the arrest of a man suspected of preparing a terrorist attack and arrests for activities linked to right-wing terrorism.

With a view to preventing (further) radicalisation where possible, the AIVD utilises partners inside and outside the criminal justice chain, for example in healthcare and social services. If AIVD intelligence can contribute to an intervention, this also helps to enhance national security.

In particular, the AIVD is broadening the scope of its cooperation in situations whereby intelligence may help to prevent cyberattacks, knowledge theft, and threats against the economic security, which are increasing from both a physical and digital perspective. In recent years the AIVD has therefore been in contact not only with ministries, but also with an increasing number of educational institutions and companies in order to assess how they can collaborate.

In 2022 this resulted in the AIVD participating in two knowledge help desks (one of which is still being set up). Universities and companies can contact these help desks with questions relating to protecting knowledge and technology against foreign espionage.

The AIVD and its partners also provide public information, partially in order to raise the public's awareness of the risks of economic espionage and the dangers of extremism and terrorism. The second Threat Assessment State-sponsored Actors, that was produced together with the MIVD and the NCTV, was published in November.



## > 4.1

# How the AIVD's work is scrutinised and overseen

- Two independent bodies oversee the AIVD's daily operations.
- This work increasingly takes place in real time.



**The main visitor entrance of the AIVD's headquarters in the Dutch city of Zoetermeer.**  
CREDIT: Hollandse Hoogte.

Oversight and scrutiny are invaluable for the legitimacy of the work of intelligence and security services in a democratic society. The AIVD's actions are therefore checked in various ways, for example by Parliament and occasionally by independent bodies like the Netherlands Court of Audit (Algemene Rekenkamer).

There are two bodies which check on a daily basis that the AIVD is acting in a lawful way, namely the Investigatory Powers Commission (Toetsingscommissie Inzet Bevoegdheden, TIB) and the Oversight Committee on the Intelligence and Security Services (Commissie van Toezicht op de Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdiensten, CTIVD).

The TIB checks whether the AIVD is legally permitted to use certain special investigatory powers, such as hacking devices, tapping telephones and intercepting communication via the cable and satellites.

### ***For its work, the CTIVD has direct access to the AIVD systems.***

The TIB carries out these checks before the AIVD utilises the special investigatory power in question. If the TIB is of the opinion that the use of a certain resource is unlawful, the AIVD will not use that resource.

The CTIVD checks the legality of the execution of the law as a whole by carrying out investigations, including into any complaints about the AIVD. The CTIVD then reports to the Dutch House of Representatives and Senate.



***In 2022 the CTIVD's complaints handling department instructed the AIVD to destroy five large collections of data, also known as bulk data sets.***

When performing its work the CTIVD has direct access to the AIVD systems. What is more, all AIVD employees are obliged to provide the CTIVD with the information requested.

In 2022 the CTIVD closely scrutinised the services' cable interception work. That work has been going on since December 2021.

The AIVD is permitted to carry out cable interception in order to protect national security, in other words it is permitted to investigate data traffic that flows along a specific Internet cable. It is only possible to carry out that work after permission has been obtained from the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations and after scrutiny by the TIB.

In 2021 and 2022 the CTIVD investigated how the services were using their relatively new cable interception powers. It found that with regard to the important points the work was being carried out lawfully, but that the services must do more to prevent (any risk of) unlawful action.

In response the services drafted a plan for improvement which included more internal checks. The CTIVD increased the level of its scrutiny while the plan for improvement was being implemented. In November 2022 the CTIVD indicated that this level of scrutiny was no longer necessary because the AIVD and MIVD had taken important steps in relation to internal checks.

In the near future the CTIVD's scrutiny of cyberoperations may increasingly take place in real time, meaning that they can review operations while they are being carried out, rather than at a later date. This was already the case during the period of enhanced scrutiny. This real-time monitoring is part of the proposal for the temporary legislation that the Ministers of the Interior and Kingdom Relations and Defence submitted to the Dutch House of Representatives in December 2022.

This so-called dynamic oversight is in line with the practicalities of cyberthreats, whereby countries that commit cyberattacks against the Netherlands frequently and quickly change infrastructure. If the attackers change devices, the AIVD wants to be able to trace them with the necessary speed and agility. The proposed legislation that has been submitted makes that possible. If the bill becomes law, the services will be able to act much more effectively against cyberthreats from countries such as China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea.

In 2022 the CTIVD's complaints handling department instructed the AIVD to destroy five large collections of data, also known as bulk data sets. Bulk data sets are of considerable operational value and necessary for the proper execution of the services' tasks. In particular, they help recognise and identify as yet unknown threats and particularly threats from abroad.

The decision by the CTIVD's complaints handling department related to data sets acquired with using special investigatory powers. Having to destroy a number of these sets represented a setback for a number of investigations into foreign threats.

A ministerial memorandum of amendments to the bill is now being drafted and is intended to make it possible to annually assess whether a data set can be retained for longer if this contributes to an investigation by the services. The memorandum also describes the terms and conditions that an extension has to fulfil.

**For more information go to:**  
[aivd.nl/veiligheids-onderzoeken](https://aivd.nl/veiligheids-onderzoeken)

## > 4.2

### How we comply with the Security and Intelligence Services Act – our licence to operate

- In 2022 the AIVD continued to work on drafting new legislation for the general intelligence and security services.
- Temporary legislation would resolve a number of the most important problems the AIVD is facing in its work.

*The ministerial memorandum of amendments also includes regulations governing the acquisition of real-time communication data*

For more information, go to: [aivd.nl/wiv](https://aivd.nl/wiv)

The Security and Intelligence Services Act 2017 describes the special investigatory powers that the AIVD has and which resources the AIVD is allowed to use and when.

In 2021 the government decided to work towards new, future-proof legislation following the reports by the relevant Evaluation Committee and the Netherlands Court of Audit regarding shortcomings in the current Security and Intelligence Services Act 2017.

The Netherlands Court of Audit concluded, for example, that when the Security and Intelligence Services Act 2017 was introduced, insufficient attention had been paid to the impact which that legislation would have on the work of the AIVD and MIVD in practice. The operational impact and effectiveness of the services have come under pressure and that is particularly apparent in the context of cyberattacks.

The Netherlands and its allies are having to deal more and more frequently with digital attacks from countries with offensive cyberprogrammes, such as Russia and China. (The chapter entitled ‘Cyberthreats’ on page X describes the current threat.)

Cyberattacks are dynamic in nature and the hackers employed by the attacking countries change infrastructure quickly and frequently. The AIVD and MIVD continuously have to submit applications for permission to monitor an attacker on these new infrastructures and that means they are constantly playing catch-up.

The problems are so urgent that the government has decided to tackle them using temporary legislation even before the Security and Intelligence Services Act 2017 is revised. In December 2022 the Ministers of the Interior and Kingdom Relations and Defence submitted a proposal for the temporary legislation to the Dutch House of Representatives.

The bill makes it possible for the oversight body to monitor the services’ cyberoperations in real time and means that, if an attacker changes infrastructure, the services no longer have to request separate permission to monitor the attacker. The legislation also gives the oversight body the option of stopping an operation immediately if that is necessary.

The Dutch House of Representatives is expected to debate the temporary legislation in the second quarter of 2023.

A ministerial memorandum of amendments to the temporary legislation deals with a second urgent problem for the services, namely the processing of bulk data sets. The ministers involved are going to develop a suitable legal framework for this which will, for example, determine when it is permissible to continue keeping data sets and when they have to be destroyed. This framework also assigns binding powers to the oversight body.

The ministerial memorandum of amendments also includes regulations governing the acquisition of real-time communication data, subject to a binding assessment by the TIB in advance. The ministerial memorandum of amendments is currently being reviewed by the Advisory Division of the Council of State.

The services’ working practices are continuously being adjusted in line with the legislation and the findings of the TIB and CTIVD. The law is technology-neutral. If threats against the Netherlands change and the technology which the AIVD has to use in order to investigate also changes, the legislator and the oversight bodies will have to work out how the legislation is applicable in the new situation.

# Key figures

161

Number of written threat reports

463

Number of intelligence analyses and intelligence reports

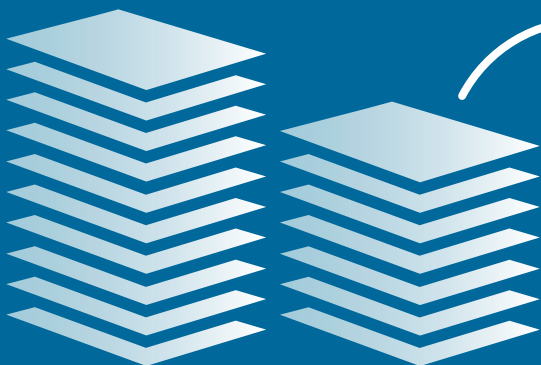
45

Number of official reports



1.930

Number of wiretaps used pursuant to Article 47 paragraph 1 of the Intelligence and Security Services Act 2017



17

Number of notifications issued

Table 3

**Number of access requests to inspect information held by the AIVD, per type**

REQUESTS	SUBMITTED	COMPLETED	INSPECTION FILE SENT	STILL PENDING
INFORMATION CONCERNING APPLICANT	347	181	31	307
INFORMATION CONCERNING DECEASED RELATIVE	50	44	8	30
INFORMATION CONCERNING ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS	29	13	11	36
INFORMATION CONCERNING THIRD PARTIES	5	6	2	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>431</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>378</b>

Clarification: The number of requests increased significantly after a media appeal at the end of August 2022. By way of comparison, 182 requests were submitted in 2021. The number of access requests to inspect information submitted relates to requests we have processed. The number of processed requests concerns not only requests submitted in 2022, but also requests from before that time.

Table 4

**Results of objections and appeals against decisions access requests to inspect information held by the AIVD**

	OBJECTIONS	APPEALS	SECOND APPEALS
COMPLETED	8	8	2
UNFOUNDED	4	1	1
WELL-FOUNDED	4	6	0
INADMISSIBLE	0	1	1
WITHDRAWN	0	1	0



**Table 5**  
**Complaints about the AIVD to the Minister of**  
**the Interior and Kingdom Relations**

STILL BEING PROCESSED AS OF 1 JANUARY 2022	4
SUBMITTED IN 2022	15
DISMISSED	6
UPHELD IN PART	1
UPHELD	0
PROCESSED INFORMALLY TO THE SATISFACTION OF THE COMPLAINANT	6
NOT PROCESSED	1
WITHDRAWN	0
FORWARDED	1
STILL BEING PROCESSED AS OF 31 DECEMBER 2022	4

**Table 6**  
**Complaints about the AIVD to the CTIVD**

STILL BEING PROCESSED AS OF 1 JANUARY 2022	4
SUBMITTED IN 2022	32
DISMISSED	1
UPHELD IN PART	1
UPHELD	1
NO CONCLUSION POSSIBLE	0
PROCESSED INFORMALLY TO THE SATISFACTION OF THE COMPLAINANT	6
NOT PROCESSED	20
WITHDRAWN	0
FORWARDED	1
STILL BEING PROCESSED AS OF 31 DECEMBER 2022	3

## Colophon

Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations  
General Intelligence and Security Service  
aivd.nl

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