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> AIVD annual report



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Foreword



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The Netherlands' security is strongly connected to global security. In recent history, this has seldom been more evident than in 2023. Two dates are particularly significant in this regard.

When I looked back in the annual report on 2022 at how the threats against the Netherlands had evolved, the date 24 February stood out: the day Russia invaded Ukraine. That conflict has claimed a terrifying number of casualties over the past year.

Tragically, 2023 will be remembered by many because of another black day: 7 October, the day on which Hamas launched a shocking series of attacks at a music festival, at kibbutzim and at military bases in Israel. Many thousands of people have been killed as a result of those attacks and in the ensuing conflict in Gaza.

The two conflicts cast a shadow over the year, because of both past suffering and fears of the potential repercussions of further escalation. Both conflicts have the potential to destabilise entire regions and even usher in an era of great insecurity for the world as a whole.

International relations are so precarious partly because the balance of power that had existed for a long time has been disturbed. Many countries are trying to strengthen their position, regardless of the consequences for other countries. They are doing so by means of espionage, cyberattacks, the exploitation of economic advantages and the expansion of their arsenals.

That is not armed combat, but it is definitely conflict, increasing the risk of clashes and providing greater opportunities for countries to inflict damage on each other. It is not surprising that this period has been described as 'the grey zone' between war and peace. For the Netherlands, whose peace and prosperity is largely due to international trade and a rule-based world order, this carries considerable risks.

Besides Russia, the biggest state threat comes from China. China is now one of the leading global powers. It has, however, achieved that position by resorting to almost any means: for years, the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) has warned that China is eroding the earning potential of Dutch businesses through cyberattacks, espionage, insider operations, covert investments and illegal exports. Detection and prevention of such activities were therefore among the AIVD's priorities in 2023.

China's economic and political power also gives it the ability to change global relations. Many countries therefore regret that China appears to have used that position in 2023 to shield Putin and his war against Ukraine from legitimate criticism and actions.

In a more interconnected world, risks soon hit close to home. For instance, tensions between the US and China in 2023 had repercussions for Dutch companies, Russia had a hand in demonstrations in the Netherlands over the war in Ukraine, and the conflict in Gaza served to harden Dutch-based extremist and terrorist groups. The conflict in Gaza, for example, could trigger radical Muslims to carry out attacks. The risk of jihadist attacks was already heightened in 2023, partly because terrorist organisations see the Netherlands as a legitimate target, following incidents involving desecration of the Quran.

To safeguard the security of the Netherlands, the AIVD therefore had to investigate threats that were not only numerous but also urgent in many cases. This was illustrated by the fact that the AIVD increasingly had to seek urgent permission from the minister to deploy a special intelligence tool in order to eliminate a potential threat to the Netherlands. The number of urgent tasks rose by 71 percent in the space of a year.

That placed huge demands on the AIVD, and even then, the efforts were still not enough in some cases. To ensure robust protection of the Netherlands against threats from China, for example, the AIVD will need to intensify its investigations. The same applies to investigations into the undermining of the democratic legal order by criminal networks. This relatively new threat – including attacks and assassinations targeting the judiciary, journalism and public administration – has the potential to erode our democratic legal order from within.

This annual report not only describes the threats but also sets out what the AIVD has done to counter them. Thanks to intelligence investigations, numerous planned terrorist attacks in the Netherlands and abroad have been averted, espionage has been prevented and the Netherlands has been able, wherever necessary, to take administrative, diplomatic or criminal justice measures against other countries. The people of the AIVD have thus made the Netherlands a safer place. I am proud of that.

It is also encouraging that the AIVD has been able to produce more relevant information than ever before to boost the resilience of the Dutch government, as well as that of the business sector, knowledge institutions and ultimately members of the public. They live and work in this world and are not powerless; they can also make a difference. If they are properly informed, they may actually be able to make choices that help make the world a safer place.

1 National threats



There was increased security at Cologne Cathedral in 2023 due to a jihadist threat. That was one of many in the year. Western intelligence and security services, including the AIVD, discovered and foiled ten or so attack plans in Europe, also in the Netherlands. Photo: EPA



> 1.1 Jihadist terrorism

- The risk of jihadist attacks in the Netherlands increased in 2023.
- Security services averted at least ten or so planned attacks in Europe.
- In four cases, people were arrested following an official report by the AIVD in the Netherlands.
- The public desecration of the Quran and the conflict between Israel and Hamas could be a trigger for radical Muslims.



Flowers at the site of the terrorist attack in Brussels on October 17, 2023. The perpetrator killed two Swedish football fans and injured a third man. Probably because of Koran destruction in Sweden. Photo: BELGA

The threat of jihadist attacks in the Netherlands and the West increased in 2023. Western intelligence and security services, including the AIVD, detected and averted at least ten or so planned attacks in Europe. In four cases, people were arrested following an official report by the AIVD in the Netherlands. They were suspected of planning or preparing an attack, either in the Netherlands or abroad.

Global jihadism has been the biggest terrorist threat to the Netherlands for many years. The movement consists of the terrorist organisations al-Qaeda and ISIS and their affiliated groups, networks and lone-actors around the world, also in the Netherlands. In its 2022 annual report, the AIVD already noted the increased threat of attacks in Europe driven by jihadist networks. The threat was posed mainly by ISKP, an ISIS chapter originating in Afghanistan.

The foiled attacks in Europe ranged from plans for random stabbings to specific preparations for attacks targeting specific events and buildings

At the beginning of 2023, a network linked to ISKP made plans to carry out an attack on the Dutch consulate in Istanbul. The plan was thwarted. At the same time, the AIVD and its European partner services were investigating an ISKP-linked network in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany. Members of the network had entered Europe within the influx of refugees from Ukraine. In July, 12 members of the network were arrested, two of them in the Netherlands: a man from Tajikistan and a woman from Kyrgyzstan, both on suspicion of terrorism.

Intervention by European intelligence and security services has mitigated the acute threat posed by those networks, but the heightened risk of attacks remains. Current events also play an important role in this respect

The foiled attacks in Europe ranged from plans for random stabbings to specific preparations for attacks targeting specific events and buildings. In some cases, the attacks were planned by networks already linked to ISIS structures. Others were new groups, formed online, which were radicalised in Europe and which sought contact with ISIS.

Intervention by European intelligence and security services has mitigated the acute threat posed by those networks, but the heightened risk of attacks remains. Current events also play an important role in this respect. The conflict between Israel and Hamas and the desecration of the Quran in a number of European countries (including the Netherlands) are issues that could potentially mobilise jihadists and other radical Muslims, serving as the trigger for an attack. This seems to have been the case in a number of European countries. Such attacks could also come from lone actors or small groups that have no formal ties to ISIS or al-Qaeda but are inspired by them. ISIS and al-Qaeda are trying to capitalise on this, having repeatedly called for attacks to be carried out.

More pro-ISIS jihadists in the Netherlands planned to leave the country and join ISIS in Somalia in 2023. The numbers were small, and none of them reached the conflict area they wanted to go to. In October, an official report from the AIVD led to the arrest of a Dutch ISIS supporter, thus preventing one instance of jihadist emigration. At the end of 2023, dozens of jihadist travellers with links to the Netherlands were still living in northern Syria. None of them returned to the Netherlands last year, but there is always a possibility that they will do so, partly because the situation in northern Syria has become more dangerous.

Last year, the AIVD also investigated whether convicted jihadists posed a threat, either during or after their imprisonment on a specialised Terrorist Ward (TA). There is a heightened threat in some cases, for example because they have an adverse influence on other prisoners, or because they are considering the use of violence in the Netherlands.

**For more information,
see aivd.nl/terrorisme**

> 1.2 Radical islam

- Various radical Islamic movements in the Netherlands could pose a threat to the democratic legal order.
- The Wahhabi Salafist movement in the Netherlands has been steering a more moderate course in recent years.
- In 2023, the AIVD also investigated what threats were posed by the Muslim Brotherhood, Hizb ut-Tahrir and Hamas.

For more information,
see aivd.nl/radicale-islam

In 2023, the AIVD investigated various Islamic movements in the Netherlands which could, on the basis of their ideology, pose a threat to the democratic legal order.

The Wahhabi Salafist movement in the Netherlands has been steering a more moderate course in recent years, and 2023 was no exception. The doctrine of the relatively large and influential fundamentalist movement are at odds with the democratic legal order, and its members may exert a disproportionate influence on the Islamic community in the Netherlands.

The movement's doctrines have, however, been given a more pragmatic interpretation in recent years. For example, leaders now allow followers to vote, and thus to participate in the political and social life of the Netherlands. The movement is also becoming less averse to dissent. Followers are told to hate 'disbelief', for instance, rather than 'nonbelievers'.

The movement propagates extremist ideologies, but it is a small group in the Netherlands with a limited reach

The movement received hardly any funding or influence from donors in the Gulf region in 2023. Wahhabi Salafist organisations appeared to be capable of raising funds in their own circles. At the same time, donors from the Gulf States seemed less inclined to pay for projects in the Netherlands. All in all, the AIVD considers the threat from the current Wahhabi Salafist movement to the democratic legal order to be low.

The threat that organisation Hizb ut-Tahrir posed was limited in 2023. The movement propagates extremist ideologies, but it is a small group in the Netherlands with a limited reach. The influence and size of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Netherlands was extremely limited in terms of influence and size in 2023, and the movement did not appear to propagate extremist ideas. It therefore posed barely any threat to the democratic legal order.

In 2023, the AIVD also looked at whether the threat to Dutch national security posed by Hamas might change, given the recent conflict in Gaza and a number of arrests in Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands. That investigation will continue in 2024.

> 1.3 Criminal undermining of the democratic legal order

- In 2023, the AIVD conducted an investigation into criminal networks that threaten the democratic legal order with extreme violence, infiltration, and corruption.
- The aim of the investigation was to ensure that judges, journalists, public administrators and members of parliament could do their work freely and safely.
- That is in keeping with the AIVD's core task: the protection of national security.

Since 2022, the AIVD has been investigating the undermining of the democratic legal order by criminal networks. A number of criminal networks have committed brutal acts of violence in public in recent years. Not only to settle scores with rival criminals, but also carried out attacks on editors, journalists, and lawyers if it served their interests. A great many public prosecutors, judges, members of parliament, and public administrators are currently under protection. The fact that persons in such professions are being targeted represents a threat to national security, as the rule of law cannot exist without the free and safe administration of justice, journalism, criminal law enforcement, and public administration.

The threat of attack and assassination has a profound effect on the sectors that are targeted. Their performance could be adversely affected, or they may pay an unacceptably high price to continue to operate. At-risk journalists, lawyers and public administrators fear for their own lives and those of their loved ones. Personal protection severely restricts their freedom of movement. Faced with the constant threat of violence, members of parliament may feel obliged to practice self-censorship, journalists may withhold publication, and lawyers and administrators may be reluctant to make certain decisions. Another risk is that non-threatened professional colleagues might prefer to avoid investigations into organised crime, or that people might shy away from pursuing a career in the police force, the legal profession, or public administration. This can erode the democratic legal order from within. Moreover, it seems from the way some criminal networks operate that their aim is to shock and terrorise society.

Some networks also threaten the democratic legal order by infiltration or corruption. They try to bribe and pressurise people in vital positions in government and in the business sector, all of which weakens government and society from within.

The threat of attack and assassination has a profound effect on the sectors that are targeted

In consultation with partners and relevant ministries and after a thorough preliminary study, the AIVD has decided to investigate the criminal undermining of the democratic legal order, as stated in previous annual reports. The AIVD's core task is to protect national security and the democratic legal order, and it is on that basis that this investigation is being conducted into the networks that are capable of (and in some cases intent on) undermining the democratic legal order.

Tracking down criminals is the task of the National Police, prosecution is the responsibility of the Public Prosecution Service. AIVD investigations help to prevent attacks on the rule of law, to protect those at risk, and to detect weaknesses in government and business (known as system vulnerabilities) so that criminals cannot exploit them.

THEME STORY

- The conflict in Gaza has served to harden the existing views of extremist movements in the Netherlands.
- Right-wing, left-wing and anti-institutional extremists feel that it confirms their world view.
- The conflict is potentially a mobilising issue for the jihadist movement.
- Controversial and often antisemitic statements by extremist leaders are spreading fear in the Jewish community in the Netherlands.



The opening image of the announcement of a new ISIS global terror campaign (title: 'kill them where you can find them'). The terrorist organization places the call in the context of the conflict in Gaza

The effect of the conflict in Gaza on extremism in the Netherlands

In the last quarter of 2023, the conflict in Gaza affected virtually all forms of extremism in the Netherlands, causing extremist movements to become more entrenched in their existing views.

The conflict has the potential to mobilise the jihadist movement. Images of the suffering of Palestinians could prompt jihadists to act and engage in terrorist violence in the Netherlands. The terrorist organisations ISIS, al-Qaeda, Hamas and Hezbollah have called on their supporters worldwide to do so. There have also been a number of terrorist attacks in Europe for which the situation in Gaza seems to have been (one of) the trigger(s). There is a risk that radicalised Muslims in the Netherlands will be inspired by such attacks or by the calls to commit them, which increases the likelihood of attacks in the Netherlands.

There has been a marked rise in the threat to Jewish and Israeli targets in the Netherlands, as illustrated by the increased threat against the Israeli embassy in The Hague in November 2023, a subject on which the AIVD issued an official report.

The conflict may also lower the threshold for action for radical Islamists who do not necessarily adhere to jihadist ideology but who feel that the violence in Gaza justifies attacks on Israeli or Jewish sites or people.

The AIVD has no evidence that the conflict in Gaza has increased the threat of violence from right-wing extremist or right-wing terrorist groups, although right-wing extremist groups are spreading even more antisemitism than was previously the case.

There are right-wing extremists who are fine with the killing of both Israelis and Muslims in the conflict because they are hostile towards both. What is striking, however, is that their hatred of Jews is often greater than their hatred of Muslims. Many right-wing extremists believe that Israel does not have the right to exist and see Hamas as a liberation movement.

Some right-wing extremists fear that the conflict will trigger an influx of refugees that will threaten the West. This idea is in keeping with the great replacement theory, a conspiracy theory that argues that a (Jewish) elite is using migration as a tool to replace, or at least weaken, white populations in Western countries.

For anti-institutional extremists, the Gaza conflict is yet another global event that they interpret as the work of an evil elite bent on oppressing the Dutch (and others).

Within the anti-institutional movement, there are two dominant narratives about the situation. The first is a mishmash of both anti-institutional and right-wing extremist views, in which Israel was founded by ‘children of the devil’ or by the Rothschild banking family. The controlling ‘Satanist elite’ is said to be working for world domination and also protecting paedophiles.

The second dominant narrative is that the conflict did not start with the Hamas attacks on 7 October, but that everything was in fact organised or authorised by the United States and Israel. Some anti-institutional extremists even argue that Hamas is a creation of Israel or the US. Those countries would supposedly benefit from a war, because Western governments would then have yet another pretext to implement measures to oppress the population.

Images of the suffering of Palestinians could prompt jihadists to act and engage in terrorist violence in the Netherlands

Such views are not without consequence. The framing that the population is being fooled – and not for the first time – by a conflict created by an elite could inspire radicalised lone actors in the Netherlands to take violent action.

There is a markedly pro-Palestinian sentiment among left-wing extremist groups. Some groups link the conflict to their ‘anti-imperialist’ agenda and have turned against the US and Israel even more specifically since the outbreak of the conflict. A few groups have welcomed the attacks carried out in Israel. Left-wing action groups have disrupted public order on a number of occasions, but it is doubtful that the threat of violence posed by these groups would go beyond a public order disturbance.

Extremist instigators had a wider audience than usual for their pronouncements about the conflict in Gaza. These usually highly controversial and extremist statements now have news value. It is doubtful that those statements will result in an increased following, but they do lead to further polarisation, and to fear in the Jewish community in the Netherlands because of their predominantly antisemitic nature.

The conflict is also giving rise to threats against people who speak out in support of Israel or the Palestinians. This is reflected in notifications received by the AIVD. It is conceivable that threats like these will cause people in general, and public administrators, people's representatives, and journalists in particular, to be wary of speaking freely about the conflict. If that happens, it will undermine the democratic legal order in the Netherlands.

Activism and extremism

The AIVD makes a distinction between activism and extremism. Both terms occur frequently in this chapter on national threats. Both activists and extremists take action with a view to bringing about (radical) social or political change. The AIVD uses the term 'activism' as long as the aims and methods do not contravene the principles of the democratic legal order. Activism may involve criticism of institutions and government policies. Such criticism is permitted in the Netherlands and is, in general, beneficial to democracy.

Protest actions by activists can of course be inconvenient or provocative for people affected by them. In some cases, laws are broken and the police are involved. However, as long as the aim or the effect of the actions is not to undermine the democratic legal order, the AIVD will not investigate. Experience does show, however, that a small proportion of activists may be radicalised to the point of extremism, and activists with radical tendencies may well attract the AIVD's attention.

The AIVD uses the term 'extremism' when activities violate the principles of the democratic legal order. Extremism can be either non-violent (intimidation, hate speech, demonisation, threats or statements that normalise extremist ideology) or violent. In its most radical form, it could result in terrorism. It is the AIVD's task to investigate and help eliminate threats against the democratic legal order.

**For more information,
see aivd.nl/extremisme**

> 1.4

Right-wing terrorism

- A fascination with gruesome violence played a more prominent role on the right-wing terrorist scene in 2023.
- Violence was discussed more frequently and was glorified as an end in itself.
- Timely intervention is likely to have prevented right-wing terrorist violence, also in the Netherlands.

A fascination with violence played a greater role in the ideology of the right-wing terrorist movement in the Netherlands in 2023. Compared to previous years, last year the AIVD observed that a fascination with aggression and bloodshed was attracting young men in particular to the right-wing terrorist scene. Ideology seemed secondary to some of them. This remained so in some cases after they had joined extremist chat groups or online platforms. For them, the main issue was being able to watch and encourage violence that was usually perverse, explicit and gruesome, such as live-streamed attacks.

Moreover, in some new online groups or forums, the unifying factor increasingly seemed to be a fascination with this type of violence, rather than a shared ideology. Violence was discussed more frequently and was glorified as an end in itself: it was not only perpetrated for ideological purposes, but sometimes purely for the suffering caused and the thrill it gave the perpetrator and the viewers.

The fact that the motivation to join right-wing terrorist groups is now more likely to revolve (purely) around violence relates to changes the right-wing terrorist movement has undergone worldwide. It still consists of young adult men who are often struggling with psychosocial problems and an unstable home situation and who interact almost exclusively online. A number of influential extremist platforms and chat groups have been shut down in recent years, following intervention by social media companies or arrests (abroad). Those platforms and chat rooms had an informal hierarchy, and right-wing terrorist ideology was the main focus. They have been replaced by offshoots and new groups that are more fragmented, with greater differences in terms of ideology.

For them, the main issue was being able to watch and encourage violence that was usually perverse, explicit and gruesome

In contrast to a few years ago, there is currently no single dominant right-wing terrorist ideology. Supporters still draw their inspiration from accelerationism, an ideology that sees terrorist attacks as a means of precipitating a race war. They also draw on occultism, and incel (involuntary celibacy) ideology. Adherents – mostly male – hold ‘the system’ responsible for their lack of sexual or romantic relationships. Another source of inspiration is ecofascism, a right-wing extremist ideology that argues that harmony between the white man and nature has been lost due to such phenomena as mass immigration, globalisation and capitalism. Groups are generally antisemitic and racist, and misogyny, homophobia and transphobia are rife.

Since the most influential online groups have splintered, the Dutch movement seems to be somewhat smaller. However, determining its size is more difficult than it used to be, as online profiles and groups come and go more rapidly, and users go to great lengths to conceal their identity.

There was and still is a real risk that lone actors in particular will become radicalised online and will want to carry out attacks

This also makes it difficult to assess the threat of violence. That threat did not increase in 2023, but neither is there any evidence to suggest that it diminished. There was and still is a real risk that lone actors in particular will become radicalised online and will want to carry out attacks.

Over the past year, a total of eleven people were killed in right-wing terrorist attacks (in America and Germany). One of the perpetrators subsequently gained the status of – in their parlance – a ‘saint’ within the right-wing terrorist movement. Timely intervention may well have prevented right-wing terrorist violence in 2023, both at home and abroad.

**For more information,
see aivd.nl/terrorisme**

> 1.5

Right-wing extremism

- Right-wing extremist groups sought more publicity in 2023, in some cases with actions designed to provoke outrage and shock.
- The message they conveyed was more often antisemitic.
- There was greater collaboration between extremist groups, also internationally.



Last year there were about ten right-wing extremist projection actions. The best known are the projections on the Erasmus Bridge during the New Year celebrations from 2022-2023 and the projection on the Anne Frank House. By provoking commotion and outrage, right-wing extremists tried to gain more attention for their ideas. Photo: ANP

Right-wing extremist groups conveyed their ideas and their hatred of minorities more openly in 2023. One method was to project antisemitic and racist text in places where it was sure to attract attention.

The best-known examples are the projections on the Erasmus Bridge on New Year's Eve 2022/2023, the projection on the Anne Frank House and the laser protest action following the king's apology for the history of slavery in the Netherlands. Last year, there were some 10 right-wing extremist projection actions, each of which made the news.

Antisemitism was spread on- and offline, with poster campaigns

Another method for seeking publicity for their ideas was to post professional-looking videos on publicly accessible social media sites and apps, aimed at young people and students. This method was particularly popular among new European identitarian groups, whose stated aim is the preservation of each country's national identity and the 'remigration' of those who do not belong.

For some years now, the right-wing extremist movement has been striving for greater social acceptance, partly by at least outwardly renouncing violence, and by presenting ideas in a sophisticated, intellectual package. In 2023, however, it seemed at times that any attention to the movement's ideology was good attention, even in the form of shock and outrage, because even this serves to increase public familiarity with right-wing extremist ideas.

The message propagated publicly by the various groups was more antisemitic in nature in 2023 than it had been in the recent past (read more about the connection with the Gaza conflict on page 12). Antisemitism was spread on- and offline, with poster campaigns, for example, and promotion of the antisemitic documentary *Europa: The Last Battle*. The antisemitic great replacement conspiracy theory remains central to their ideology. This is the idea that a Jewish elite is stirring up mass migration to replace or weaken the white population in Western countries.

Groups also seem to be more collaborative and often have a professional organisational structure. This degree of collaboration is a new development. In the past, groups ranging from neo-Nazis and national socialists to identitarian groups and ethnic nationalists were more likely to regard each other as rivals.

In 2023 it seemed that any attention to the movement's ideology was good attention, even in the form of shock and outrage

Groups are also interacting more in an international context. International meetings are used as networking events by organisations such as the European 'Active Clubs', which met, for example, during Poland's Independence Day celebrations in November 2023.

Active Club members train together in (combat) sports to boost their physical and mental resilience in preparation for a potential race war. They foresee such a war in the future but do not go into specific detail about it. Some Active Clubs abroad, in the US for example, have used violence against their opponents.

Even if right-wing extremist groups do not advocate terrorist attacks, they still pose a threat to the democratic legal order because their ideology is diametrically opposed to it. This threat would be all the more pronounced if their ideas were to achieve widespread acceptance, which is the groups' stated objective. Extremist groups can also encourage lone actors to radicalise and resort to (terrorist) violence by cultivating a breeding ground for hate, demonising their enemies and condoning violence.

For more information,
see aivd.nl/extremisme

> 1.6 Anti- institutional extremism

- In 2023, anti-institutional extremists increasingly withdrew into their own ranks.
- Municipalities, the Tax Administration, the police and the judiciary struggled with self-declared ‘sovereign citizens’ who believe that laws and rules do not apply to them.
- A small, radical subgroup is preparing to fight the ‘evil elite’ with violence.

In 2023, elements of the extremist anti-institutional movement were increasingly occupied with withdrawing from Dutch society and forming their own parallel societies. In previous years, the emphasis had been more on protesting. The threat posed by the movement has thus changed in part, but has not diminished.

The world view shared by anti-institutional groups is that an evil elite is operating in the Netherlands (and worldwide), a conspiracy of rich and powerful people who are intent on gaining world domination and are oppressing – and if necessary eliminating – ordinary people in order to do so. Anti-institutional groups regard themselves as being ‘at war’ with that elite.

Adherents constantly see the hand of that evil elite in new developments. For example, the coronavirus crisis is thought to have been fabricated in order to restrict people’s liberty. Just like the nitrogen issue, the ‘climate hoax’, the war in Ukraine and the recent conflict between Israel and Hamas.

In response to what they perceived as threatening measures and fabrications, anti-institutional extremists began to withdraw more and more into their own ranks in 2023. Generally speaking, this process became more organised and occurred less frequently in separate groups.

Most prominent last year were the self-proclaimed ‘sovereign citizens’. Drawing on a variety of conspiracy theories, sovereign citizens believe that the government has no legitimate power, and that laws and regulations therefore do not apply to them unless they consent to them themselves. Municipalities, the tax authorities, the police and the judiciary have struggled at times with how to deal with them. This was partly because the officials involved can face harassment, doxing (the publication of someone’s private data online) and threats.

Some of the movement’s leaders give ‘legal advice’ to their adherents, for which they charge a fee. The advice is neither sound nor legally valid, but it enables them to earn money from their followers, some of whom are then pushed further into debt. It is also a means of further alienating their supporters from society.

The AIVD has identified three main subgroups among ‘sovereign citizens’. Members of the first subgroup do not reject the system, but want to become as independent from society as possible. For instance, some consider setting up their own medical care or education. This is not extremist behaviour, nor does this group pose a threat of violence. Many members of this first group do, however, help to spread a narrative that undermines the democratic legal order.

A smaller but substantial subgroup is more radical. They too try to isolate themselves, but are intolerant of society’s rules and democratic institutions, including the government. They refuse to pay rent, taxes or fines. When this leads to confrontations, they react aggressively in some cases. On one occasion, for instance, a special enforcement officer was hit by a car, and a police officer was assaulted when they asked to see a driving licence. A bailiff who came to collect a debt was also taken hostage for a brief period. Supporters are working on their own passports and money. The AIVD expects this group to expand.

The third subgroup is preparing to fight the evil elite with force. Leaders urge supporters to take matters into their own hands and replace the Dutch legal system with their own system of militias, ‘sheriffs’ and people’s courts. Some adherents take firearms lessons and combat training with this purpose in mind.

In most cases, this talk of war is no more than just that: talk. Last year, however, a number of self-declared sovereign citizens (and anti-institutional extremists who embrace other labels) threatened to kill local public officials. In September, a former serviceman who referred to himself as a sovereign citizen was given an 18-month custodial sentence, 12 months of which were suspended. He had attempted to buy semiautomatic weapons and ammunition for a group of like-minded former military personnel.

Leaders urge supporters to take matters into their own hands and replace the legal system with their own system of militias and people’s courts

In 2023, the anti-institutional movement represented a threefold threat. First, the threat of the anti-institutional narrative of an evil elite, which fuels suspicion about democratic institutions and can insidiously undermine the workings of the democratic legal order if enough people subscribe to it.

Second, there is the threat of non-violent extremism, encompassing such phenomena as hate speech, demonisation and intimidation. This threat can also come from within democratic institutions themselves if they employ anti-institutional extremists who actively propagate their ideas. Third, there is the threat of (terrorist) violence. The multifaceted nature of this phenomenon shows that anti-institutional extremism has in recent years evolved into a complex threat to the democratic legal order, both in the short and long term.

**For more information,
see aivd.nl/extremisme**

> 1.7

Left-wing extremism

- **Anarchist and anti-fascist groups see the rise of the far right as one of the biggest problems of our time.**
- **In 2023, they tried to intimidate or obstruct right-wingers more than they had previously.**

In 2023, anarchist and anti-fascist groups in the Netherlands attempted more than ever before to obstruct or intimidate right-wing individuals and groups. They defaced buildings used for meetings, sealed locks with glue, vandalised property and published personal data online ('doxing'). They also tried to put pressure on venue and café owners not to allow right-wing groups into their premises.

Left-wing extremists see the rise of the right as a major problem. The revival of anti-right-wing and anti-fascist protest follows several years of polarisation between left-wing and right-wing movements on issues that society feels strongly about. For left-wing groups, climate, gender, animal rights, housing, perceived police violence and immigration policy are extremely important at the moment. Most of the protest actions they organised in 2023 revolved around these issues.

Left-wing extremist groups capitalise on issues that are of concern to many people by incorporating them into their world view. This seems to help them grow. Central to the anarchist world view is the idea that the existing political and economic system is flawed and must be challenged.

They defaced buildings used for meetings, sealed locks with glue, vandalised property and published personal data online (doxing)

Given that anarchists in particular are seeking more confrontation with right-wing individuals and groups, and that the movement is heavily engaged in current and divisive issues, could potentially lead to greater radicalisation. The AIVD saw no evidence of this in 2023, but will remain vigilant in this respect.

Nor did the AIVD see any indication that left-wing extremism had become a more attractive proposition for left-wing activist groups in 2023. They conducted multiple and in some cases highly visible campaigns on issues such as climate, but they stayed away from the extremist path. They did not, for example, use violence to achieve their goals. While activism may be inconvenient or intrusive for those affected by it, and while the police are required to intervene at some demonstrations, it does not threaten the democratic legal order. Investigating activism is therefore not one of the AIVD's statutory duties. Read more about the distinction between activism and extremism in the inset on page 14.

2

International threats



High level talks between US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping during the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in November 2023. Tensions between the two major powers increased over the past year. It also had consequences for Dutch businesses. Photo: EPA



THEME STORY

- **Detecting and countering Chinese cyberattacks and understanding the intentions, capabilities and actions towards the Netherlands were a priority for the AIVD in 2023.**
- **China is emerging ever more clearly as a challenger to the current international legal order.**
- **Because of its size and economic might, the country has the real potential to change global relations.**

How China is trying to change the global balance of power

China continued to challenge the world order in 2023. The aim of the Chinese government is to become a major leading nation on the global stage, and the implications of that aim for other countries, including the Netherlands, could be wide-ranging and profound.

The regime believes that the current system of international relations favours the West and fails to take into account the needs of other countries, especially those of the Global South, of which China claims to be the leader. China's actions have a major impact on the world economy and global trade, and on how norms and values, including human rights, are handled internationally. Because of its size, economic might and authority in organisations such as the United Nations, China has the real potential to change global relations.

China's choices are centred on its own national security. When Xi Jinping began his third term as secretary-general of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in November 2022, he announced that national security would be of paramount importance. This was immediately reflected in the adoption of new laws in 2023. These gave the party-state even greater control over society and had immediate repercussions inside and outside China.

The laws in question include the new counter-espionage law and the law on foreign relations. The data protection law, which entered into effect earlier, is also relevant here. The counter-espionage law requires all Chinese citizens, including those outside China, to contribute to China's national security. The Chinese authorities can thus call upon all layers of society; not only China's vast intelligence apparatus, but also students, academics, businesses and interest groups operating in the Netherlands. This is known as the whole-of-society approach.

The law also gives the government the right to act against threats outside its own territory. This could mean that the Chinese government is able to interfere in the lives of people in the Netherlands who have a Chinese background. They may be asked or forced to gather information for the authorities.

The new laws may also affect Dutch companies in China. The legal texts are worded in such a way that it is not exactly clear what constitutes an offence. This uncertainty may prompt companies to scale down their operations in China or to leave the country altogether.

The law on foreign relations reveals China's geopolitical intentions. It provides for the country's 'participation' in the reform and establishment of a global system of governance, a form of international cooperation designed to give China greater global influence at the expense of America and the West. China is thus confirming what has been becoming increasingly clear in recent years, namely that it wants to change international institutions to its own advantage. Where necessary, China will establish parallel consultation structures.

The regime is also expanding the partnerships that it already dominates. One example is BRICS, the economic partnership between Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. In August 2023, BRICS announced that it would be admitting six new member countries. Cooperation such as this also contributes to China's economic growth.

In October 2023, Beijing celebrated the 10th anniversary of China's massive investment project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Over the course of 10 years, China has invested billions of dollars in the construction of roads, railway lines, ports and internet infrastructure in countries in Asia, Europe and East Africa. This allows China to trade more efficiently with those countries, to access key raw materials and to gain geopolitical influence. The BRI will focus on high-end and green technology, science, media and culture in the coming years. Through such investments, China is strengthening its dominance in the world and thus consolidating its position as a challenger to the current international legal order.

Dutch people who have a Chinese background may be asked or forced to gather information for the authorities

This became most evident in 2023 in its relationship with the United States, a shift that had implications for the Netherlands. China is a direct threat to the leading position of the United States in the world. The US therefore aims to prevent China from gaining a technological advantage over the West by restricting the export of certain high-tech products to China. Dutch companies making such products were affected by those export restrictions in 2023.

China has been modernising its military significantly in recent years, using state-of-the-art technology. The stronger China's military, the more capable it is of taking control of Taiwan, for example. China regards Taiwan as part of its territory and seems determined to bring the island back under its influence. Although it would prefer to do so peacefully, Xi Jinping reaffirmed at the last party congress that he did not rule out the use of force. This would require a modern military force, and it is clear that China is working on that. Up-to-date weapon systems, for China's navy for example, will require a great deal of high-tech expertise.

***The stronger
China's military,
the more capable
it is of taking
control of Taiwan,
for example***

For more information,
see aivd.nl/spionage

China has in the meantime become a leader in the field of artificial intelligence (AI). In order to maintain and extend that leading position, the country is desperate for more data. China is attempting to acquire technology, knowledge and data in the usual way, for instance by collaborating with Western technology companies, universities and research institutes. But the country uses espionage, including cyber espionage too. It also tries to steal sensitive business information from the West to strengthen its own economic position.

The Netherlands represents an attractive target in this respect, particularly because of our knowledge economy and highly developed high-tech sector. China carries out large numbers of cyberattacks, and those attacks are highly sophisticated. It is for this reason that China currently poses one of the greatest cyber threats to the Netherlands and to Dutch interests. (For further information on this subject, see the chapter on cyber threats on page 32).

Detecting and countering such sophisticated attacks and understanding China's intentions, capabilities and actions in respect of the Netherlands are a priority for the AIVD. Investigation in this area proved challenging in 2023. The AIVD therefore needs to step up its efforts in order to ensure robust protection of Dutch national security against potential threats from China.

For all its ambitions, China needs a strong economy. However, the Chinese economy is currently exhibiting some structural problems. For example, one of the main drivers of China's economic growth was for a long time the real estate sector, but that sector has now all but stagnated. Many Chinese people lost the money they had invested in new-build property. Youth unemployment is high. At the same time, the population is ageing and the birth rate is declining. In addition, local authorities have huge debts, which prevent them from paying pensions, other services and outstanding invoices from suppliers. It remains to be seen whether the CCP will be able to cope with these problems in the long term and maintain public order in the country, and whether these developments will affect the Chinese threat to Dutch national security interests.

The investigation of China by the AIVD and MIVD

The AIVD and the Military Intelligence and Security Service (MIVD) are jointly investigating the threat posed by China. Their investigation:

- helps the Dutch government, knowledge institutions and the business sector to balance the risks and the opportunities involved in working with China;
- helps to counter the undesirable transfer of knowledge and to protect the democratic legal order in the Netherlands;
- helps the Netherlands to protect its economic security interests and to maintain strategic autonomy.

> 2.1 Espionage and interference in the Netherlands

- In 2023, the AIVD detected espionage attempts by various countries, including Russia and China.
- Russia also had a hand in demonstrations in the Netherlands against support for Ukraine.
- Various Western countries spoke out last year against the threat of violence posed by Iran to their residents.

The threat of espionage in the Netherlands was current and acute in 2023. Many countries were trying to improve their global position by covert and illicit means. By stealing secrets from countries such as the Netherlands, they expected to gain a political, economic or military advantage.

Together with the MIVD, the AIVD discovered that Russian intelligence services were surreptitiously attempting to access supply industry information systems of the Ministry of Defence. The Dutch armed forces are of interest to the Russian services, partly because of the military support provided by the Netherlands to Ukraine last year. Russian intelligence services are also interested in Dutch government policy regarding Russia and Ukraine, as well as in information relating to NATO, the EU and the Dutch high-tech sector.

Last year, China tried to get hold of Dutch technological and trade secrets that could help the country to further develop its own high-quality knowledge industry. The Dutch companies that develop or use the most sophisticated technology are world leaders and thus a high-value target. China is also trying to get hold of other sensitive corporate information that could be used to strengthen the country's economic position.

A number of foreign intelligence agencies targeted not only central government and top sectors in 2023, but also specific institutions and local authorities. Espionage ultimately affects every Dutch citizen, as it can make the world less safe and the Netherlands less independent. Economic espionage means that innovative knowledge, technology and jobs could disappear from the Netherlands. The job of the AIVD is therefore to detect espionage at an early stage and to work with partners to counter it.

Covert influencing

Foreign intelligence services were active in the Netherlands last year with the aim of influencing public opinion or political decision-making. For example, Russia had a hand in demonstrations against Western support for Ukraine that were held in the Netherlands and other Western countries in 2023. The purpose seemed to be to give Russians (and sympathisers) in particular the idea that there was strong opposition in the West to supporting Ukraine.

The actions are in keeping with Russia's agenda to undermine support for Ukraine by fostering war fatigue in the West and casting Western countries in a bad light. Russia did the same last year, for example, in Africa, Latin America and Asia, where it openly and covertly disseminated or amplified pro-Russian, anti-Western and anti-colonial sentiment.

The intelligence services of a number of other countries were also operating in the Netherlands with the aim of influencing political decision-making to their own advantage. What was striking was that the actions not only targeted national government, but also local authorities in some cases. Like espionage, covert influencing threatens the security of the Netherlands and undermines our democratic legal order.

Interference in diaspora communities

Countries with a large diaspora in the Netherlands, such as Morocco and Turkey, engage in influencing or intelligence activities that are often designed to strengthen the relationship with the diaspora and to use former compatriots to champion their interests in the Netherlands. In return for their cooperation, people may be rewarded with invitations to events at the embassy, for example, or with practical assistance in administrative matters. People who speak out about injustices in certain countries, however, could be subjected to intimidation and interference in their lives. It could, for example, be made difficult for them to return to their country of origin, with which they may still feel a cultural and religious connection or where they might still have family or property.

The intelligence activities of other countries could also be aimed at identifying and silencing (perceived) opponents

The intelligence activities of other countries could also be aimed at identifying and silencing (perceived) opponents and political dissidents. In 2023, the AIVD found that foreign intelligence services were harassing dissidents abroad online, including in the Netherlands. People who spoke out against the regime of their country of origin were criticised and threatened on social media, for instance. The signal being sent by foreign intelligence services is that (former) citizens should not assume that they are safe or that they are off the radar of the authorities because they now live in a Western country.

Countries such as China, Russia and Iran will, when necessary, put huge pressure on people to take – or refrain from taking – certain actions. Some countries will not hesitate to threaten political opponents abroad with violence or even abduct or murder them. Russia, Iran and Pakistan are among the countries that have done so in the Netherlands and/or in other countries in the past.

Politicians and governments in the US, the United Kingdom, Germany and Australia spoke out last year about the very real threat of violence Iran posed to their residents. The British Secretary of State for Justice claimed, for example, that the Iranian government was responsible for more than fifteen threats to kill or abduct British citizens last year.

Dutch nationals living in or visiting authoritarian countries also risk being detained under false pretences and could then be used as diplomatic pawns in what is known as hostage diplomacy.

**For more information,
see aivd.nl/spionage**

THEME STORY

- Russia considers itself to be in an existential conflict with the West.
- In 2023, the country regularly sought to cast Western countries in a bad light and to undermine the unity between them.
- The Netherlands proved to be a major target for espionage, partly because of its support for Ukraine.



Russia's war against Ukraine became increasingly one of trench battles towards the end of 2023 (like here in northeastern Ukraine). Meanwhile, Russia's attitude against the West also hardened. Photo: Abaca Press

Russia continued to seek confrontation with the West in 2023

Russia's stance in 2023 made it clear that it would continue to seek confrontation with Western countries in the near future. Russia considers itself to be in an existential conflict with the West, a conflict in which its sphere of influence and status as a superpower are at stake. The desired outcome for Moscow is a world order in which America is not the only remaining superpower. Regardless of how the confrontation proceeds, the Russian regime will do whatever it takes to hold onto power. That makes it unlikely that anything will change in terms of its attitude any time soon, even if the conflict in Ukraine were to reach a stalemate, or in the event of a ceasefire.

Russia sought confrontation with the West on a number of fronts in 2023, with direct or indirect implications for the Netherlands. To start with, Russia openly used its oil and gas supplies as a political and economic weapon. The country also made diplomatic waves, particularly by undermining Western partnerships or by competing with them through alternative alliances of existing or emerging powers, such as BRICS, the SCO and OPEC+. Russia tried to become an agenda-setter in those alliances. (See further information about China's role in this type of consultative structure from page 24.)



Promotional images from the Russian Ministry of Defense. Russia is trying portray the population's image of the war against Ukraine as positive. Also by giving Russians the idea that there is a lot of criticism in the West of its military support to Ukraine.

Photo: Russian Ministry of Defense, via AP

Russian hackers attempt to access the information systems of the government, the Ministry of Defence and organisations involved in international policymaking

In 2023 Russia also repeatedly sought, both openly and covertly, to cast Western countries in a bad light, undermine the unity between them and influence the mood in society. It also capitalised on social uncertainties, pro-Russian or anti-Western sentiment that existed in Western societies. For example, demonstrations in which Russia had a hand took place in a number of Western countries in 2023, including the Netherlands. Demonstrators were paid to take to the streets with prefabricated slogans. The demonstrations were primarily intended to give Russians (and sympathisers) the idea that there was strong opposition in the West to providing military support for Ukraine.

Russia also tried to stimulate war fatigue in the West and to erode support for backing Ukraine, stressing that such assistance (and the sanctions against Russia) was costing Western citizens money. Russia focused its covert influencing activities mainly on large European countries. But wherever Moscow sees a chance, it is opportunistic enough to exploit it, so the Netherlands is never out of range. Moreover, influencing campaigns against allies can affect the Netherlands indirectly. Lastly, the Netherlands is in Russia's sights because it is home to major international organisations, including those responsible for investigating possible war crimes by Russia in Ukraine.

This is partly why the Netherlands is a major espionage target for Russian intelligence and security services, which are endeavouring to obtain information on government decision-making about Russia and Ukraine, about NATO and the EU and about the Dutch high-tech sector. Russian spies are also targeting the Dutch military and the defence industry because of the extensive military support provided to Ukraine by the Netherlands in 2023.

The AIVD and MIVD expect more Russian intelligence officers to attempt to engage in espionage under cover as business people or journalists. In the past, Russian spies often posed as diplomats in order to benefit from protected diplomatic status. However, the Netherlands expelled most of the Russian intelligence officers with this cover in 2022 and operates an effective visa policy. This made it more difficult for Russia to engage in espionage in the Netherlands in 2023.

Russia also sought confrontation with the West in the cyberdomain. (For more information, see the chapter on cyber threats on page 32.) Typically, Russian cyberattacks targeting the Netherlands and other EU and NATO countries were mainly for political and diplomatic purposes, with Russian hackers attempting to access the information systems of the government, the Ministry of Defence and organisations involved in international policymaking. The purpose of many Russian cyberattacks in the EU and against NATO countries appeared to be to find out more about support for Ukraine. In Ukraine itself, Russia conducted cyberoperations to spy, influence and disrupt, and in some cases sabotage systems. The AIVD and MIVD have signs that Russia has also used digital technology in Ukraine to provide tactical support for its own army in ground operations, for example when Russian hackers temporarily disrupted Ukrainian communications.

Putin faced his first serious internal challenge in 2023: the mutiny by Yevgeny Prigozhin

Inside Russia, President Putin faced his first serious internal challenge in 2023: the mutiny by mercenary leader Yevgeny Prigozhin and his private military company, Wagner. Prigozhin initially seemed to have gotten away with his revolt. On 24 August, however, he was killed in a plane crash. The circumstances cannot be independently established, but it was widely believed that Putin had taken his revenge.

While Moscow was focused on the war in Ukraine, Russia's authority in other former Soviet republics seems to have become less evident. It is not only Ukraine that wants to join the EU, but also Moldova and Georgia. Armenia is turning more pointedly towards the West and, when Nagorno-Karabakh was occupied by Azerbaijan, Russia played no role. That does not mean that Russia no longer has any influence there. Many countries in the region still stand to benefit from their relationship with Russia, and even a weakened Moscow has sufficient means to make life difficult for states in the region.

The investigation of Russia by the AIVD and MIVD

The AIVD and MIVD are jointly investigating what threat Russia poses to the Netherlands. The services are boosting the resilience of potential targets of Russian espionage, influencing and cyberattacks, especially that of the Dutch government. They disrupt (cyber)operations by the Russian intelligence and security services FSB, SVR and GRU at home and abroad. They also provide the Dutch government and ministries with intelligence relating to Russian threats so that the government can formulate appropriate policy.

> 2.2

Cyber threats

- **In 2023, the AIVD observed various foreign cyberoperations worldwide that were probably carried out for the purpose of sabotage.**
- **Countries were increasingly sophisticated in the attempts to conceal their involvement in cyberattacks in 2023.**
- **The AIVD notes a rise in the number of countries that are developing more offensive cyber capabilities.**

Of all the cyberthreats, digital sabotage is potentially the most dangerous to society, as it can easily result in severe economic damage and social disruption. The AIVD observed various foreign cyberoperations in 2023 that in all likelihood had sabotage as their ultimate objective.

The operations were conducted by or by order of state actors and specifically targeted critical infrastructure in other countries. It is likely that the immediate aim was not to disrupt communications or paralyse the energy network, but to embed the capability to do so later, for example in the event of a conflict.

The discoveries were made in the same year that software company Microsoft announced that it had ‘plausible evidence’ that the hacking network Volt Typhoon was incorporating sabotage capabilities into the communications infrastructure between the US and Asia. Volt Typhoon is linked to China. The discoveries also came a year after the government networks of Albania were successfully attacked for the purpose of sabotage. That was probably the first successful cyber sabotage attack on the networks of a NATO member state. Albania and the US hold Iran responsible for the attack.

In 2023, countries were becoming increasingly sophisticated in their attempts to conceal their involvement in cyberattacks. One method was to exploit the possibilities of the software used by the victim in what is known as a living-off-the-land attack. Such as the functionality for admin and maintenance, which provides extensive user rights. A hacker thus leaves fewer digital fingerprints, and it is more difficult to prove a country’s involvement.

Hostile hackers also route their attacks through major networks of worldwide servers that they have hired or hacked. There are now companies that set up and maintain anonymisation networks such as these. State actors can access them easily, which makes it increasingly difficult to determine who is responsible for an attack.

A hacker thus leaves fewer digital fingerprints, and it is more difficult to prove a country’s involvement

The AIVD saw in 2023 that state-sponsored hackers were frequently exploiting as yet unknown vulnerabilities in commonly used software. If a software vulnerability is not yet widely known – known as a zero-day vulnerability – there is usually no security update available. Security measures such as detection and monitoring could help to mitigate the risk that a zero-day vulnerability will be exploited, but few companies and organisations implement such measures adequately.

Many vulnerabilities in commercial software are known. The AIVD frequently encountered cases in 2023 in which countries with offensive cyber programmes were able to exploit vulnerabilities within hours of their disclosure. It is imperative, therefore, that organisations install all available security updates as soon as possible.

Countries with offensive cyber programmes still make extensive use of spear phishing: they send emails that appear to be reliable and relevant, and then when the recipient opens the infected link or attachment, hackers gain access to the user's computer network.

In 2022, for example, Russian hackers conducted a large-scale phishing campaign known as 'Diplomatic Orbiter' because it targeted diplomats and think tanks all over the world. The media have written extensively over the past year about a Russian hacktivist group alleged to have carried out distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks against NATO and EU organisations. In a DDoS attack, a website or service is accessed so frequently in a short space of time that it becomes temporarily overloaded. Although such attacks can cause alarm and inconvenience, the impact on national security is usually limited.

It is likely that the immediate aim was not to disrupt communications or paralyse the energy network, but to embed the capability to do so later

The AIVD is seeing a growth in the number of countries that are developing more extensive offensive cyber capabilities. For years now, Russia, China, Iran and North Korea have been using their cyber programmes for sabotage, (economic and political) espionage, influencing operations and the monitoring of dissidents.

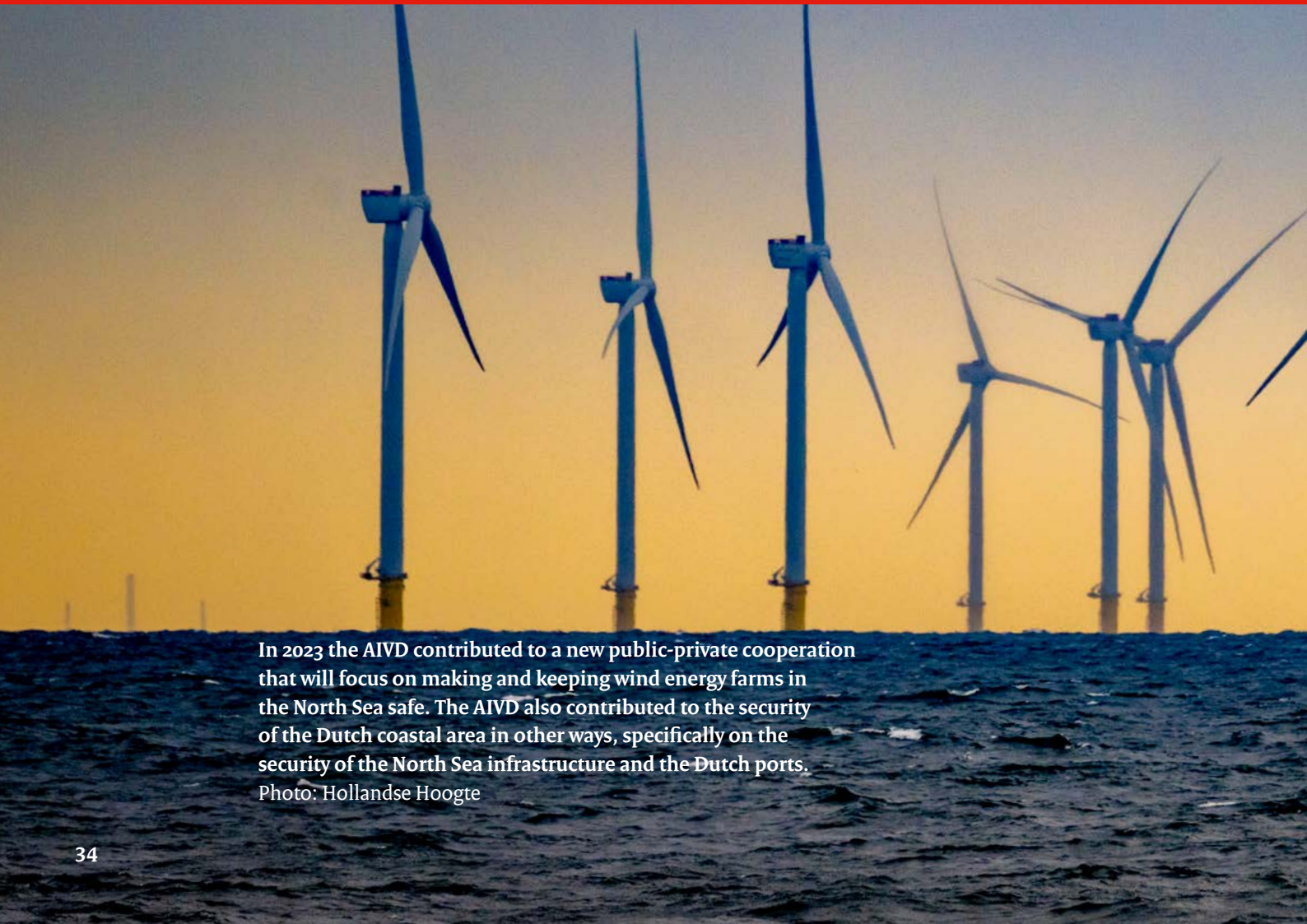
A growing number of countries which did not previously have an offensive cyber programme are now either investing in such programmes, receiving support from allies to do so or buying sophisticated commercial spyware. The AIVD and the MIVD did not identify any attacks from these countries targeting the Netherlands.

The fact that more countries are launching cyberattack programmes is in keeping with the shift in the global balance of power. In a competitive world, countries want to gain a strategic advantage in the cyber domain. The chapters on Russia (page 29) and China (page 24) examine this in more detail. The AIVD and the MIVD collaborate closely when investigating countries with an offensive cyber programme.

**For more information,
see aivd.nl/cyberdreiging**

3

Helping to prevent or eliminate threats



In 2023 the AIVD contributed to a new public-private cooperation that will focus on making and keeping wind energy farms in the North Sea safe. The AIVD also contributed to the security of the Dutch coastal area in other ways, specifically on the security of the North Sea infrastructure and the Dutch ports.
Photo: Hollandse Hoogte



THEME STORY

- **The number of organisations that asked the AIVD for current information and practical advice grew in 2023.**
- **To allow more organisations to benefit from its unique knowledge, the AIVD collaborates with more partners, including some outside central government.**
- **In 2023, the AIVD investigated the opportunities and risks involved in artificial intelligence in respect of Dutch security.**

Society's need for resilience poses new challenges for the AIVD

The AIVD not only conducts intelligence investigations into threats against the Netherlands. It is also the service's duty to use its intelligence position to boost the resilience of the government, critical sectors, knowledge institutions and segments of the business sector. The AIVD raises awareness of the risks of espionage, sabotage and knowledge theft, advises on appropriate security measures, helps the central government to protect state secrets and provides possible solutions and advice for organisations affected by espionage and knowledge theft.

The AIVD has received a growing number of enquiries relating to this resilience task in recent years. The number of organisations asking the AIVD for up-to-date information and practical advice also increased. This is undoubtedly in connection with the rising number of cyber and espionage incidents facing Dutch high-tech companies, knowledge institutions and central government, as well as society's growing awareness of these risks. Advice and possible courses of action are increasingly being sought by non-traditional partners of the AIVD, in other words organisations outside central government and the critical sectors that the AIVD would normally advise. The queries also focus more on actual situations.

This poses a challenge for the AIVD, as the increased need for advice on and products for resilience requires greater capacity. In 2023, the AIVD therefore invested in the fields of knowledge security, economic security and the protection of critical interests.

The AIVD has also sought to collaborate with other relevant parties. That is efficient: partnerships allow multiple organisations to benefit simultaneously from the AIVD's knowledge position. It is also effective, as resilience requires an integrated approach, coordinated both within the Dutch government and between the government and society. One example of such collaboration was the AIVD's continued contribution in 2023 to the National Contact Point for Knowledge Security, which was established in January 2022 and in which all relevant government parties collaborate to assist Dutch knowledge institutions with security issues. More than 200 cases were submitted in 2023.

The AIVD was also involved in setting up the Business Advice Centre for Economic Security, which is the central point of contact within government for knowledge-intensive small and medium-sized enterprises with queries about economic security and in which the MIVD and various ministries are also involved.

Last year, the AIVD also sought collaboration outside central government. In a pilot project, the service shared threat information with public and private parties for the first time. This was done through the Cyclotron programme, which was set up to enable public-private parties to share information quickly and efficiently in the event of a (threatening) cyber incident.

Secure critical processes and a secure government

Another important theme on the topic of resilience in 2023 was the AIVD's contribution to critical sector security. The sabotage (whether digital or physical) of critical processes could jeopardise Dutch national security. The AIVD produces specific, customised threat assessments and (security) recommendations for companies in these sectors. In 2023, these were produced specifically for the Dutch energy, telecommunications, maritime and civil aviation sectors.

The AIVD also contributed to the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management's Protection of North Sea Infrastructure Programme (PBNI). As the name suggests, this focuses on the protection of the critical maritime infrastructure in Dutch coastal areas and the Dutch Exclusive Economic Zone. The AIVD indicated what state-level threats had been identified in this respect and also contributed to a dedicated ports programme. The service also participated in a new public-private partnership focusing on the protection of wind farms in the North Sea.

The AIVD produced various threat assessments and risk analyses that helped to boost the resilience of Dutch civil aviation. Those analyses were conducted at the request of the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (NCTV) and the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management. Throughout the year, the AIVD also answered questions from the sector, assisted in advisory processes and gave security briefings.

Resilience requires an integrated approach, coordinated both within the Dutch government and between the government and society

The AIVD contributed to the introduction of new European guidelines designed to make critical processes more secure. For instance, the European Critical Entities Resilience (CER) Directive is set to be incorporated into Dutch legislation in 2024. The CER Directive provides new principles for the security of, for example, energy producers and drinking water supply companies. From now on more sectors will now be designated as critical.

Various ministries and the NCTV determine which sectors these are, partly on the basis of resilience assessments, for which the AIVD supplies threat information. The European Network and Information Systems Directive (NIS2) is also to be incorporated into Dutch legislation in 2024. This second directive was designed to boost the cybersecurity of essential services. NIS2 contains more stringent security standards and reporting requirements in the event of a cyber incident. In 2023, the AIVD provided the organisations concerned with advice and information regarding threats and possible measures to counter them.

In 2023, the AIVD produced a review of the risks involved when civil servants use applications created in countries with an offensive cyber programme directed at the Netherlands. One of those applications is TikTok. It was partly this review that prompted the government to toughen its policy regarding the use of apps on mobile work devices.

Secure information and security products

Together with the Ministry of Defence and the MIVD, the AIVD oversees the security of internationally classified information, in other words the classified information of the EU, NATO and the European Space Agency (ESA). The AIVD is the National Security Authority and as such it inspects parts of the government and companies that are allowed to work with classified information. The AIVD checks both their physical and digital security.

The AIVD also contributes to the development of reliable information security products. Cryptographic security products cannot work without keys. The AIVD develops and distributes cryptographic keys through the National Distribution Authority. Demand for them is growing.

The AIVD investigates the risks posed by AI and how to guard against them

The National Crypto Strategy (NCS) dictates how the government can ensure that high-quality information security products remain available for highly sensitive information. The products developed in 2023 under that strategy will be delivered soon. Development of new security products for other requirements could begin in 2024. The AIVD and the ministries participating in the NCS are looking at how to further strengthen the Dutchcrypto industry. This is necessary in order to remain a crypto-producing nation, a status that gives the Netherlands an important strategic position in terms of crypto in the EU and NATO.

To be able to share classified information securely with other countries, the Netherlands sets out the necessary arrangements in General Security Agreements (GSAs). Since the end of 2019, the AIVD has been responsible for the negotiations for these security agreements, which it conducts with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defence, and Economic Affairs and Climate Policy. The GSAs with Belgium and Poland were ratified and implemented in 2023.

Protection against the cyber threats of the future

The AIVD is always looking ahead at technologies that could be important for the Netherlands. It is investigating the safe use of post-quantum cryptography, the cloud and artificial intelligence (AI). AI has skyrocketed over the past year, especially with the arrival of ChatGPT in late 2022. The AIVD is looking at what AI can contribute to the Netherlands' resilience, what risks the technology poses and how to guard against them, and how to secure AI systems. The AIVD released a brochure in 2023 on this subject, entitled 'AI systems: develop them securely', in which it describes attacks that can be made on AI systems. The brochure also provides principles that organisations can use to develop AI systems securely. Moreover, the AIVD explores the impact generative AI (such as large language models, on which ChatGPT is based) could have on cybersecurity in general. The National Cyber Security Centre and the Dutch Authority for Digital Infrastructure are collaborating in that exploration.

For more information,
see aivd.nl/weerbaarheid

> 3.1

Political intelligence

- **At the request of the government, the AIVD investigates events abroad that could be significant to Dutch national security.**
- **In 2023, one of the AIVD's focus areas was the effect of the conflict in Gaza on stability in the Middle East.**

On behalf of the Dutch government, the AIVD collects and analyses intelligence regarding events and issues abroad that could be significant to national security. This helps the Dutch government in negotiations and policymaking designed to make the Netherlands safer. The government needs to be able to do this on the basis of their own intelligence without relying on information from other countries. Intelligence investigations can also reveal the hidden agendas of other countries.

In 2023, the AIVD was asked by the government to investigate whether the conflict in Gaza would have implications for Dutch national security. The AIVD also looked at what the conflict meant for the geopolitical situation and stability in the Middle East and at the role played in the conflict by the major powers in the region. The service also examined the impact of the situation on extremism in the Netherlands (further details on this subject on page 12).

Last year, the AIVD also looked at the shifts in the global balance of power. The role played by countries such as Russia and China – in economic, military and political terms – has implications for Dutch security, the availability of raw materials, the way Dutch companies and knowledge institutions operate and global stability. The chapters on China (page 24) and Russia (page 29) examine this in more detail.

Requests from the Dutch government for the AIVD to start or widen investigations in international crisis situations at short notice have increased in recent years.

One of the AIVD's six statutory tasks is together international intelligence. It is becoming increasingly apparent that this task cannot be separated from the AIVD's first statutory task: the investigation of individuals and organisations that pose a threat to national security.

Integrated Order

Decisions regarding which countries and issues the intelligence services should investigate are taken by the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, the Minister of Defence and the Prime Minister as the Minister of General Affairs. Other ministries are also involved. The choice of countries and issues is laid down in the Integrated Intelligence and Security Order (GA I&V). The current GA I&V, which covers the period 2023-2026, is the result of close collaboration with the MIVD and the other ministries. The Integrated Order is evaluated on an annual basis and modified as necessary on the basis of the current threat landscape. The threats from China and the danger that the democratic legal order is being undermined by criminal networks feature prominently in the 2024 update. The precise content of the Integrated Order is classified.

> 3.2

Counter-proliferation

- Iran and North Korea took a hard line against the international inspection agencies, whose tasks include the monitoring of nuclear programmes.
- International partnerships trying to limit the development and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction came under pressure.
- Based on intelligence from the AIVD and MIVD, the Netherlands implemented measures against Russian and Iranian procurement networks operating here.
- Developments in biotechnology are so rapid that investigation of biological weapons programmes is proving essential.



North Korea's Kim Jong-Un visits Vladimir Putin in September 2023 to discuss cooperation between the two countries. In the background a rocket engine is visible.

Photo: Korean Central News Agency/Korea News Service via AP

Russia, Iran, North Korea and Syria toughened their stance in 2023 against the international inspection agencies that monitor nuclear programmes and compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention. Export control regimes were also under pressure. These are partnerships of countries that are trying to limit the development and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Both developments undermine international non proliferation treaties and serve to pit countries against each other to an even greater extent.

Export control regimes are under pressure in part because participating countries frequently have differing views on which countries or developments they consider to be a threat and on what measures they should take. Countries then often agree on sanctions and controls in other contexts. This has the disadvantage that countries act less in unison and more in separate "blocs". And countries of concern nevertheless manage to import technology that allows them to start or continue developing weapons of mass destruction.

For example, investigations by the AIVD and MIVD found that Russia was circumventing EU sanctions on exports of dual-use goods (equipment, technology, materials or software that can be used for both civilian and military purposes) by procuring them through intermediary countries, in particular the United Arab Emirates, Turkey and Kazakhstan. This makes it harder to prevent exports. Some cases also involved dual-use goods from the Netherlands. In 2023, the Counter-Proliferation Unit (UCP) of the AIVD and MIVD investigated various Russian and Iranian procurement networks and informed other government departments. The Netherlands subsequently implemented diplomatic, administrative or criminal measures, depending on the case.

The international community is trying to prevent the development of weapons of mass destruction by establishing controls in the countries that have signed treaties to that effect. The inspections are conducted by independent agencies, such as the IAEA, which carries out inspections in countries with nuclear programmes on behalf of the UN, and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague, which is responsible for the international verification of signatory states' implementation of and compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Those agencies faced a tougher stance from countries of concern in 2023, for example in the case of Iran, whose cooperation with the IAEA was spotty. Iran revoked the accreditation of a group of inspectors, restricted access to sites that the IAEA deemed relevant, and rendered data from monitoring devices inaccessible. In September, the IAEA announced that it was thus unable to verify that Iran's nuclear programme was intended for peaceful purposes only. Iran has in the meantime continued to develop its military space programme and has expanded its missile capabilities with missiles it describes as hypersonic. Technology such as this can be used to develop a missile that could be armed with a weapon of mass destruction.

The constant flow of publications and Russian spending shows that Russia is continuing to invest in research on chemical weapons

In the Iran nuclear deal, the UN Security Council, the European Union and Iran agreed that international restrictions on Iran's import and export of missile technology would expire on 18 October 2023. A day before the restrictions ended, Russia announced that it would in future follow Russian guidelines in any missile technology deals with Iran, without the involvement of the UN Security Council. If such trade does actually take place, it will be a step towards closer military cooperation between the two countries.

North Korea has also strengthened ties with Russia, and it too has been less than cooperative with the IAEA. The country levelled fierce criticism at the UN atomic agency, accusing it of being the mouthpiece of the US. In March, North Korea published pictures of what it claimed was a newly developed nuclear warhead, intended for tactical nuclear deployment. Last year, the country presented a new submarine capable of carrying tactical nuclear weapons. It also launched a solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile which is designed for strategic nuclear weapons that could threaten NATO. North Korea also launched a military satellite into orbit.

The AIVD and the MIVD also investigated the military-biological capabilities and activities of Russia and China. Developments in biotechnology are rapid, which means that investigation of possible biological weapons programmes is essential. The development and possession of biological weapons is a violation of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. The investigation of military-biological programmes is complex, however, given that biological capabilities can easily be used for peaceful purposes too, such as vaccine development.

The Counter-Proliferation Unit (UCP) also investigated Russia's chemical weapons capabilities. The constant flow of (scientific) publications and Russian spending on chemical (research) facilities shows that Russia is continuing to invest in research on chemical weapons. The unit also examined Russia's deployment of riot control agents (such as tear gas) in the war against Ukraine. The deployment of chemical agents in a war is prohibited under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The UCP also investigated the intentions and capabilities of the Syrian regime in terms of chemical weapons. One area of concern was how Syria deals with OPCW inspections. They have stagnated because of Syria's stance and because of a growing polarisation between member states of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The Counter-Proliferation Unit (UCP)

The Counter-Proliferation Unit is a joint division of the AIVD and the MIVD. The unit investigates whether countries representing a potential threat to international security – referred to as countries of concern – have or are developing weapons of mass destruction. Countries such as China, Russia, Iran and North Korea are trying to get hold of Western technology and knowledge in order to start or expand their weapons programme and the UCP helps to prevent that. The year 2023 marked the UCP's 15th anniversary.

**For more information,
see [aivd.nl/
massa-vernietigingswapens](https://aivd.nl/massa-vernietigingswapens)**

**Or listen to the third season of
the Dutch-language podcast
De Dienst, at aivd.nl/podcast.
It is about how the Counter-
Proliferation Unit conducts
its investigations.**

> 3.3

The AIVD's role in the surveillance and protection system

- **Members of parliament and members of government received a great many intimidating messages and threats, including death threats, in 2023.**
- **Intelligence provided by the AIVD was fed into the system that governs the surveillance and protection of individuals and organisations.**

For more information, see aivd.nl/bewakenenbeveiligen

The AIVD is a partner in the surveillance and protection system, which provides security for prominent individuals, events, organisations and their premises. The AIVD produces risk analyses, resilience assessments, threat analyses and threat assessments, which then inform decisions by the Public Prosecution Service and the NCTV on whether such individuals, premises or organisations require (additional) security to operate safely.

There was again a significant threat to Dutch members of parliament and members of the government in 2023. The number of reported cases of serious threats and incitement against the country's politicians has been on the rise for a few years now. In 2023, the threat came mainly from anti-institutional extremists and left-wing extremists. Ministers, state secretaries and MPs received many intimidating messages and threats, including death threats, and there have been cases of physical intimidation and violence. This is inextricably linked to the ongoing polarisation in certain parts of society and in the political sphere. It is not only extremists, but also terrorists and criminal networks that continue to pose a threat to prominent figures. In 2023, the AIVD produced threat assessments and analyses for parliamentary elections, for diplomats and diplomatic premises and for international organisations and national events (King's Day, National Remembrance Day, Veterans' Day and the State Opening of Parliament).

There have been cases of physical intimidation and violence

The surveillance and protection system will be reconfigured in the coming years, partly as a result of a thorough analysis by the Dutch Safety Board. One change will be a greater concentration of authority within the NCTV. The NCTV has since embarked on a process of change designed to make the system more future-proof. The AIVD is taking part in that process, which also requires additional investment on the part of the service. Under the new system, the AIVD will continue to provide intelligence-led threat assessments and analyses, thus adding value to the security of individuals, services and sites in the Netherlands.

> 3.4

Security screening

- **The demand for security screenings increased by 20% in 2023, partly because the civil aviation sector and the Ministry of Defence were recruiting more staff.**
- **Demand exceeded the available capacity, so measures were taken by the Security Screening Unit.**

Together with other mandated parties (the National Police and the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee), the Security Screening Unit (UVO) completed 85,622 security screenings. This represented an increase of 20 percent compared to the previous year. Demand for security screenings rose because the number of confidential positions in the Netherlands increased, and more staff were taken on in the civil aviation sector and by the Ministry of Defence.

At least 90 percent of all security screenings must be completed within a statutory period of eight weeks. In 2023, the UVO issued a decision within that period in 86.6 percent of cases.

The demand for security screenings far exceeded the available capacity. Screening is also becoming increasingly complex because more people are spending longer periods abroad. This has to be taken into account in screenings, which makes the process more time-intensive.

In order to follow the processing rules in 2024, the unit is recruiting more staff and has made better arrangements with requesting parties to stagger the applications. In addition, security screenings by the AIVD and the MIVD will in future be conducted in a uniform manner, thus enabling greater use of technology.

The unit has been working for some time now to improve its work processes in order to cope with increasing demand for security screenings in the long term. The electronic Personnel Information Submission Form (eOPG) was expanded in 2023. Thanks to computerised components and modified procedures, many security screenings can now be handled faster.

The unit is also working on coping with the increasing demand for security screenings in the long term

In the third quarter of 2023, the Ministry of Defence joined the Automatic Alert System (AA), which notifies the UVO of any changes in the Criminal Records System in relation to a member of staff in a confidential position, or of any other information that could cause the certificate of no objection (VGB) to be revoked. Now that the Ministry of Defence is linked to the system, 85 percent of all staff in confidential positions are now connected to AA.

Lastly, the UVO was working on a revision of the Security Screening Act (WVO) in 2023. Among the aspects regulated by the bill are the establishment of a register for staff in confidential positions and the advent of a site-specific VGB for civil aviation and the freight and supply chain. The Council of State issued a recommendation on the bill in November 2023. The bill itself is expected to be presented to the House of Representatives in 2024.

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

SCREENINGS	POSITIVE DECISIONS	NEGATIVE DECISIONS	TOTAL NUMBER OF DECISIONS
LEVEL A, BY UVO	5,769	25	5,794
LEVEL B, BY UVO	20,371	49	20,420
LEVEL B, TAKEN OVER BY UVO FROM KMAR	8,547	1,681	10,228
LEVEL C, BY UVO	5,095	11	5,106
TOTAL NUMBER OF SCREENINGS BY UVO	39,782	1,766	41,548
LEVEL B, BY KMAR AND NATIONAL POLICE*	44,074	0**	44,074
TOTAL NUMBER OF SCREENINGS	83,856	1,766	85,622

* The National Police mandate was terminated by mutual agreement as from 1 February 2023.

** The National Police and KMar do not issue negative decisions themselves. In case of doubt regarding a Level B security screening, the investigation will be handed over to the UVO.

Negative decisions are added to the number of negative decisions made by the AIVD, which explains why the figure here is 0.

Table 2
Security screenings: results of objections and appeals

	OBJECTIONS RECEIVED	RULING ON OBJECTION	RULING ON APPEAL	RULING ON SECOND APPEAL
UNFOUNDED	-	29	1	1
WELL-FOUNDED	-	9	1	0
INADMISSIBLE	-	13	1	0
WITHDRAWN	-	6	3	0
TOTAL	122	57	6	1

Notes on key figures for security screenings

Of the total number of screenings in 2023, 41,548 were conducted by the UVO itself (19,671 by the AIVD and 21,877 by the MIVD) and 44,074 by the mandated parties. Depending on the nature of a confidential position and the potential harm the official or candidate for that position could cause to national security, a Level A, B or C screening will be initiated. The Level A screening is the most in-depth and is intended for the most sensitive confidential positions.

For further information,
see [aivd.nl/
veiligheidsonderzoeken](https://aivd.nl/veiligheidsonderzoeken)

Security Screening Unit

The Security Screening Unit (UVO) is a joint unit of the AIVD and the MIVD. The unit conducts security screenings of officials in confidential positions and applicants for such positions, i.e. people who in the course of their work have access to classified information or are in a position from which they could harm national security. Examples include employees of central government, the Ministry of Defence, civil aviation and companies involved in critical processes. Once a screening has been completed successfully, the candidate will be issued with a certificate of no objection (VGB).

4 Organisation and key figures



Director-General Erik Akerboom of the AIVD on the Binnenhof. The actions of the AIVD are independently monitored in various ways. Including parliamentary oversight.
Photo: Hollandse Hoogte



> 4.1

Scrutiny and oversight of the work of the AIVD

- **The TIB and the CTIVD independently monitor the legitimacy of the AIVD's actions.**
- **In 2023, the CTIVD started an investigation into the deployment of 'agents' by the service.**
- **The oversight bodies ruled that the AIVD and MIVD are ready to expand their cable interception operations.**

Scrutiny and oversight are vital for the legitimacy of the work of the AIVD. The AIVD's actions are subject to various independent checks, for example by Parliament and by bodies such as the Netherlands Court of Audit (Algemene Rekenkamer). Two committees monitor the AIVD on a daily basis to ensure that it is acting properly, namely the Investigatory Powers Commission (Toetsingscommissie Inzet Bevoegdheden, TIB) and the Oversight Committee for 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, telephone taps and the interception of communications via fibre-optic cables and satellites. The TIB carries out these checks before the AIVD deploys 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 it. The CTIVD checks the legality of the execution of the Intelligence and Security Services Act (Wet op de Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdiensten, Wiv 2017) as a whole by carrying out investigations and dealing with any complaints about the AIVD. The CTIVD then reports to the House of Representatives and the Senate of the States General. To perform its work, the CTIVD has access to the AIVD's systems, and all AIVD staff are obliged to provide the CTIVD with all information requested.

The CTIVD initiated three investigations in 2023 into the AIVD's legal authority to deploy 'agents'. An agent is someone who is asked by the AIVD to gather specific information. This is usually someone from outside the service, but it could also be an AIVD staff member working under cover. An undercover operation could also take place online, in which case the agent would be virtual. The CTIVD investigates the deployment of virtual agents, how the AIVD handles its duty of care for its agents' mental well-being and the deployment of journalists as agents.

Last year, the AIVD and MIVD implemented the recommendations made previously by the CTIVD (in review report no. 74 2002) on tools and sources for open source (OSINT) investigation and created an assessment framework on the use of the so-called Automated Open Source Intelligence Tools. The AIVD and the oversight body are still discussing how the use of such tools can be better aligned with the way the service generally deals with operational tools.

In 2023, the CTIVD drew its conclusions on how the AIVD and MIVD handled cable interception: the investigation of data traffic that flows along a specific internet cable. In 2021 and 2022, the CTIVD increased its oversight of that interception, as it was a relatively new power at the time. On 23 January 2024, the responsible ministers presented the results of the investigation to the Senate and House of Representatives. According to the CTIVD, the services showed that they were able to process the data collected in the first phase of the investigation properly and carefully. The oversight body also ruled that compliance was sufficiently in order for the services to expand its cable interception operations. The CTIVD does stipulate, however, that the services need to further intensify their efforts in terms of data processing. The AIVD and MIVD have taken significant steps in this regard over the past year. In parallel with the expansion of their cable interception operations, the services are constantly working to further improve their processes.

> 4.2

The legal framework in which the AIVD operates

- In 2023, the House of Representatives debated provisional legislation designed to enable the services to defend the Netherlands more effectively against countries with an offensive cyber programme.
- The AIVD and the MIVD issued a joint report on how the services operated between 2018 and 2023, a period of exceptional security challenges for the Netherlands.

The Intelligence and Security Services Act (Wiv 2017) sets out the tasks and powers of the AIVD and the MIVD. It has been clear for a number of years now that parts of WIV 2017 do not provide adequately for the services' modern operational practices. Independent investigation by the Wiv 2017 Evaluation Committee and the Netherlands Court of Audit confirmed the shortcomings that affect the services in practice: scope for innovation was limited, and they were in danger of becoming less agile in dealing with foreign threats after the introduction of Wiv 2017. The services' effectiveness and readiness for the future were under pressure. The government therefore decided in 2021 that Wiv 2017 should be radically overhauled.

In September 2023, the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations presented a framework memorandum to the House of Representatives, outlining proposals for the revision. A new, future-proof Security and Intelligence Services Act will be drafted on the basis of that memorandum and a debate that will be held on the issue at some point later on.

In 2023, the House of Representatives also considered temporary legislation designed to address the most urgent problems until WIV 2017 has been revised. This 'temporary act on investigations by the AIVD and MIVD into countries with offensive cyber programmes, bulk datasets and other specific provisions' is intended to enable the services to defend the Netherlands more effectively against countries with an offensive cyber programme.

This will be made possible partly by providing greater clarity on the use of cable interception, hacking authority and the opportunity to use bulk datasets for longer. The temporary act also makes provisions for the services to appeal to the Council of State against binding judgements by the TIB and the CTIVD.

To perform its work, the CTIVD has access to the AIVD's systems, and all AIVD staff are obliged to provide the CTIVD with all information requested

Transitional regulations have also been drawn up in consultation with the CTIVD for the bulk datasets used by the services in their investigations. The transitional regulations stipulate that the services may use those datasets for a longer period in the interests of national security following a substantiated request to the minister and under the binding supervision of the CTIVD.

The temporary act was passed by a large majority in the House of Representatives on 24 October 2023 and by the Senate on 12 March 2024. The AIVD and MIVD have launched a programme to prepare their work processes for the new act's entry into force.

Over the past few years, the Netherlands has been confronted with multiple, simultaneous dominant threats, both new and existing ones

One of the requirements of Wiv 2017 is for the AIVD to issue a public report every year. The AIVD and the MIVD are also required to produce a report every five years on their performance under the new law. The two services did so for the first time in 2023 with the publication of 'AIVD/MIVD 2018-2023, verslag van het functioneren van de diensten' (AIVD/MIVD 2018-2023: report on the performance of the services).

The five-yearly report sets out how the AIVD and the MIVD coped with the exceptional challenges they faced over that period, during which the threat situation changed drastically. The situation was and still is characterised by a wide array of threats.

Over the past few years, the Netherlands has been confronted with multiple, simultaneous dominant threats, both new and existing ones. This required an increased number of investigations and an augmentation of the services' capacity. State-sponsored threats, mainly from Russia and China, and cyber threats took centre stage, placing the services in the vanguard of a digital front. It also required major investment in technology as well as new ways of working in order to use the technology and data effectively.

At the same time, the services were hamstrung in that very area as a result of the introduction of WIV 2017. As mentioned earlier, the act unleashed such major changes in terms of assessment, monitoring and data processing in a short space of time that it hampered overall the services' effectiveness and technological innovation.

In addition, the requirement that the AIVD obtain prior approval for the use of digital instruments turned out to be an issue. The report also focused on the operational successes that the AIVD and MIVD had nevertheless achieved. These included intervention in the activities of Russian intelligence and security services, which played a dominant role in the threat situation, as well as eliminating a number of actual threats from jihadists and right-wing terrorists. That saved lives and made the Netherlands a safer place.

**For further information,
see aivd.nl/wiv**

Key figures



30

notifications issued



56

official reports

67

written
threat reports



340

intelligence reports



1.117

wiretaps used under Wiv 2017,
article 47, para 1

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	473	454	176	341
INFORMATION CONCERNING DECEASED RELATIVE	77	74	22	41
INFORMATION CONCERNING ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS	28	20	14	41
INFORMATION CONCERNING THIRD PARTIES	20	21	3	6
TOTAL	598	569	215	429

Table 4
Results of objections and appeals against decisions access requests

	OBJECTIONS	APPEALS	SECOND APPEALS
COMPLETED	22	14*	1
UNFOUNDED	15	1	0
WELL-FOUNDED (IN PART)	4	12	1
INADMISSIBLE	2	1	0
WITHDRAWN	1	0	0

* Of the 14 applications for judicial review, 11 were not decided in time. All of them were upheld.

Table 5

Complaints about the AIVD to the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations

STILL BEING PROCESSED AS OF 1 JANUARY 2023	4
SUBMITTED IN 2023	26
DISMISSED	8
UPHELD IN PART	4
UPHELD	0
PROCESSED INFORMALLY TO THE SATISFACTION OF THE COMPLAINANT	8
NOT PROCESSED	4
WITHDRAWN	0
FORWARDED	0
STILL BEING PROCESSED AS OF 31 DECEMBER 2023	6

Table 6

Complaints about the AIVD to the CTIVD

STILL BEING PROCESSED AS OF 1 JANUARY 2023	3
SUBMITTED IN 2023	21
DISMISSED	4
UPHELD IN PART	0
UPHELD	0
NO JUDGMENT	0
PROCESSED INFORMALLY TO THE SATISFACTION OF THE COMPLAINANT	4
NOT PROCESSED	11
WITHDRAWN	0
FORWARDED	2
STILL BEING PROCESSED AS OF 31 DECEMBER 2023	3

Colophon

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

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April 2024