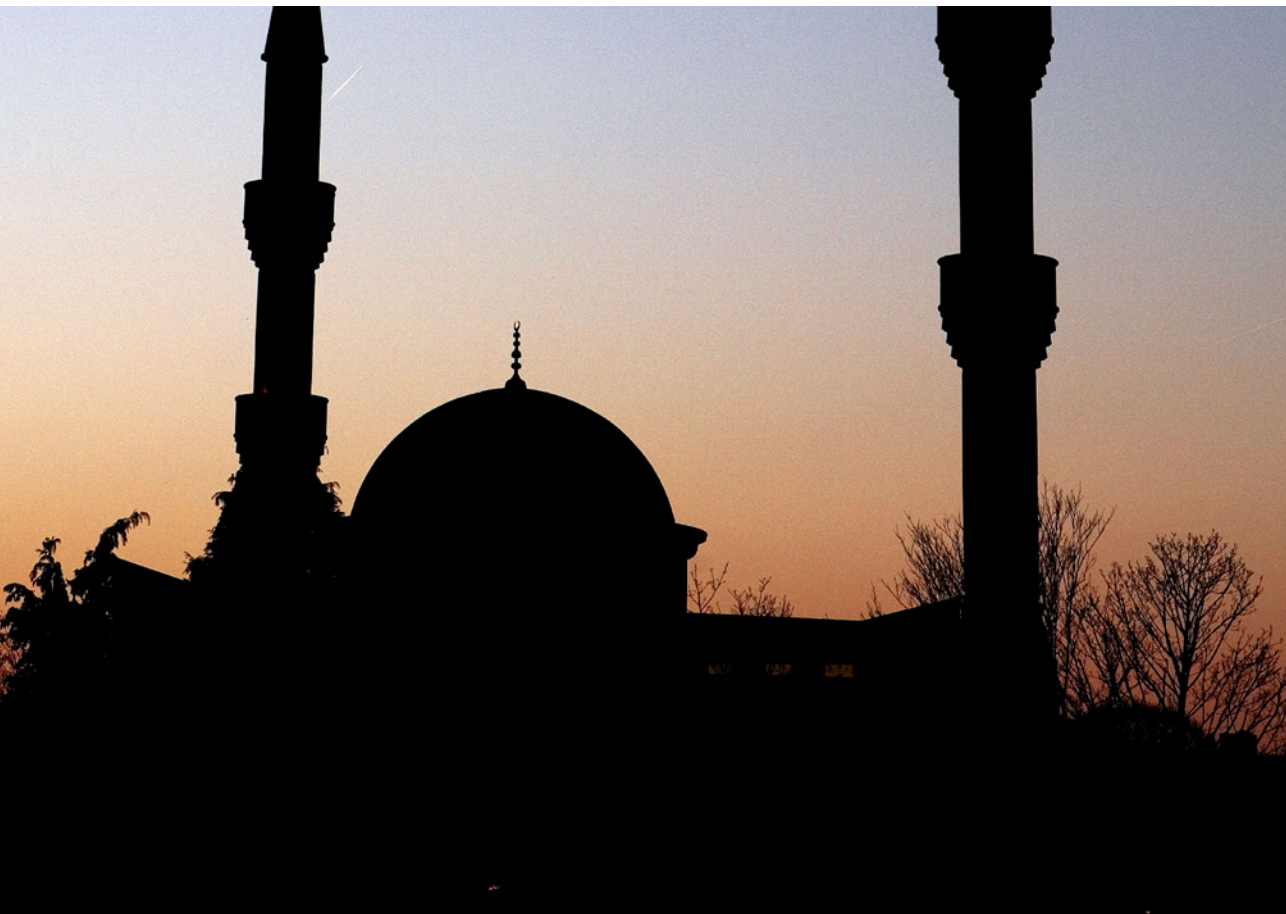




General Intelligence and
Security Service
*Ministry of the Interior and
Kingdom Relations*

Resilience and Resistance

Current trends and developments
in Salafism in the Netherlands



Foreword

The report '*Weerstand en tegenkracht*' ('Resilience and Resistance') by the General Intelligence and Security Service of the Netherlands (AIVD) highlights the current trends and developments relating to Salafism in the Netherlands. This report is a follow-up to the AIVD publication 'The Radical Dawa in Transition' ('*Radicale dawa in verandering*'), which was published in the autumn of 2007. It describes the nature and scale of non-violent radical Islam and the related risks it poses for the democratic legal order. At the time, the AIVD observed that a radical and intolerant Islamic ideology was being spread in the Netherlands and Europe on an ever-increasing scale and in an increasingly organised way. In the Netherlands, Salafism in particular was gaining ground. Within Salafism there is a movement that, through an activist approach, strives for strict adherence to Islamic law and regulations, which can lead to intolerance and polarisation. A growing section of the young Muslim population was proving receptive to this movement and, under its influence, increasingly rejected Western society.

The task of the AIVD is not only to identify threats, but also to play a role in building resilience to those threats. In that context, during the past two years the AIVD has visited several mayors and ten regional councils in order to inform local authorities about the growth and professionalisation of the non-violent radical dawa, and several Salafism in particular. The local authorities were also informed about the risks posed for the democratic legal order in the short and long term.

Publications about the risks posed by Salafism and about local-government initiatives have contributed to the increasing resilience against the radical dawa within the Dutch Muslim community. Increasingly, moderate Muslims are daring to speak out at local and national level against the anti-integrative and intolerant isolationist message of the Salafist preachers. As a result of this increasing resistance, the growth of the Salafist movement in the Netherlands is currently stagnating and part of the breeding ground for radicalisation is consequently disappearing.

Despite this positive development, Salafism remains a movement that can have a polarising influence on society. When making a careful and balanced assessment of the threat, it is important not to either underestimate or overestimate the problems and issues at hand. It is therefore important to continue monitoring the development of Salafism.

Director of the General Intelligence and Security Service of the Netherlands

G.L. Bouman



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1. Salafism in the Netherlands

A Salafist faith community has existed in the Netherlands since the end of the 1980s. Salafism is an ideological movement within Islam that advocates a return to the original sources of Islam. In practice, this means that Salafists should interpret and follow the Koran literally and reject all forms of religious modernity and modern-day reforms to their doctrine. Moreover, Salafist doctrine does not recognise the Western democratic legal order.

At the beginning of this century, a number of Salafist centres in the Netherlands became discredited when it was discovered that radicalisation and even recruiting activities for the jihad had been taking place in and around the centres. In 2002 in the Indian state of Kashmir, two Moroccan-Dutch youths from the Al Fourkaan mosque in Eindhoven lost their lives. It is very likely that they had been recruited at this mosque and had travelled to India to take part in the jihad. Two years later, the El Tahweed mosque in Amsterdam received negative media coverage following the murder of Theo van Gogh, when it was discovered that his murderer and other members of the Hofstad Network (*Hofstadgroep*) were regular worshippers at the mosque.

Also the As-Sunnah mosque in The Hague was discredited as a result of suspected recruitment activities and the highly controversial statements of Imam Fawaz Jneid. The Tilburg Islamic Foundation for Education and the Propagation of Knowledge gained notoriety when, in 2004, the Syrian imam Ahmed Salam refused to shake the hand of Rita Verdonk, then Minister for Immigration. Last year, the Imam's son Suhayb Salam was accused in the media of preaching hate while teaching the Koran.

Today, in 2009, the situation at the four Salafist centres seems to be less turbulent. The AIVD has no information to indicate that the centres are still recruiting for the jihad among visitors to the mosques. Whenever recruitment activity is suspected, the leaders of the mosque immediately speak out against the use of violence. Furthermore, followers of the jihadist ideology are refused admission to the mosque. The aforementioned imams no longer make radical or anti-integrative statements in public, and there appears to be greater opportunity for the expression of more moderate views among the Muslim community in the Netherlands. In this report, the AIVD examines the current trends and developments of the past two years in Salafism in the Netherlands. Central to this discussion is the influence of Salafist centres on polarisation and intolerance in society.

Dawa

The term 'dawa' denotes 'the call to Islam' and its main aim is to encourage as many Muslims as possible to practice Islam in a peaceful manner. The term 'radical dawa' refers to the message disseminated by radical or ultra-orthodox Islamic movements. Adherents of these movements are very rigid in their religious interpretations and reject all forms of religious modernity and modifications of their doctrine. They aim to reform society according to a radical Islamic model and they reject Western democracy and open pluralist society.



2. Current trends and developments

2.1 The Salafist centres are no longer a breeding ground for jihadist terrorism

In the past two years, the Salafist centres have stepped away from the use of violence. In the past, the imams of these centres tolerated violent expression of views by attendees of the mosques, thereby indirectly creating an opportunity for the growth of jihadist ideology. Today, the Salafist centres call upon believers to use democratic means and they discourage the use of violence. In this way, the Salafist imams hope to ensure broad acceptance in society for non-violent ultra-orthodox Islam. They are aware that subversive statements and calls to violence can damage the likelihood of broad social acceptance. For that reason, persons advocating a violent ideology are no longer tolerated at the Salafist centres and there is a degree of 'self-policing'. This means that fewer and fewer violent statements are being heard from the Salafist mosques.

Persons and networks that follow a violent ideology are no longer finding the confirmation and inspiration they seek in the Salafist centres. They are therefore taking refuge in other meeting places, such as the Internet or alternative locations of their own choice. In recent years, there has been little or no radicalisation towards violence within the Salafist centres. Jihadist youths are avoiding these prayer houses precisely because of the increased vigilance of the mosque leaders and the social control exercised by fellow believers. Consequently their does not appear to be a 'ripple effect', whereby jihadist youths spread out away to other mosques in the Netherlands.

2.2 The Salafist centres are still spreading an anti-integrative and isolationist message

Although Salafist preachers preach a moderate message in public, behind closed doors they are not afraid to agitate against the West and encourage isolationism among their followers. Therefore the Salafist centres are still communicating an anti-integrative and intolerant isolationist message that is incompatible with democratic principles and can have a disruptive influence on society. Certain preachers call on their community not to adapt to western society and to place Islamic law and regulations above the law of the Netherlands. This happens mainly during Koran lessons or during personal conversations in which Muslims ask Salafist preachers for advice on practical subjects such as family matters. In private, a number of Salafist preachers still speak negatively about homosexuals, Jews and Shi-ites. Muslims are supposed to avoid contact with non-believers and only join exclusively Muslim organisations. Women are told that that they cannot study or enter paid employment – or only to a very limited extent – and they are not allowed outdoors without the permission or supervision of a male relative.

2.3 Professionalisation of the Salafist dawa is continuing

The professionalisation of Salafism, as described in the AIVD publication 'The Radical Dawa in Transition' (*'Radicale dawa in verandering'*), has continued in recent years. The Salafist centres are focussing on improving their position within the Muslim community in the Netherlands. The new generation of preachers are usually trained at one of the four main Salafist centres so that they will be able to spread the Salafist message themselves in the near future.

Some of these preachers are already active as imams or teachers at other mosques, or travel around the country to teach and give lectures in mosques and youth centres. In this way also, practising Muslims from elsewhere in the Netherlands come into contact with Salafist ideology. Thus small centres evolve from which the Salafist message is disseminated. Often these centres are influenced by one of the four main Salafist centres in the Netherlands. Examples are the Foundation for Islamic Youth (*Stichting Islamitische Jongeren*) in Breda and the Institute for Teaching and Education (*Instituut voor Opvoeding en Educatie*), which was founded by the youth preacher Suhayb Salam in Utrecht. The impact of these small centres and foundations is still modest. This has to do with the limited, often very local reach of these centres and the relatively high level of resilience against Salafism that has grown in recent years within existing mosques and local Muslim communities. However, rivalry and personal envy between the various Salafist preachers are also preventing the opportunities for growth from being fully utilised.

Subsidies

The Salafist centres are increasingly making use of subsidies provided by local authorities for projects relating to, for example, homework supervision, cultural and sporting events, and social assistance. The subsidies are intended to enhance the employment prospects, social participation and social integration of young Muslims. In some cases, however, the money is used to disseminate the Salafist ideology, which is in fact diametrically opposed to the objectives for which the subsidies are intended. Over the past year, local authorities have become increasingly alert to the possible misuse of such subsidies by Salafist centres. The *Wegwijzer Façadepolitiek* (Façade Policy Guide), published by the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations at the beginning of 2009, is a guide designed to help local authorities identify and deal with such activities.

2.4 Increasing resistance in the Muslim community to the radical Salafist *dawa*

In recent years within the Muslim community in the Netherlands, there has been increasing resistance to the anti-integrative and intolerant isolationist message of Salafism. As a result, the growth of the Salafist movement in the Netherlands is currently stagnating. Public debate and policy measures introduced by the government have encouraged moderate Muslims to speak out more frequently against the radical *dawa*. Examples of this are the polemic between politician Ahmed Marcouch and Imam Fawaz Jneid of the As-Sunnah mosque regarding the dress code, and the debates in Tilburg surrounding the Salam family. In addition, moderate Muslims are also offering courses on Islam and the Koran on a limited scale.

It is not only moderate Muslims who are opposing the Salafist centres. Orthodox Muslims are also turning away from certain Salafist preachers, mainly because of their perceived opportunistic behaviour. Although the preachers call upon their community to live according to the ultra-orthodox rules of Salafism, their own personal lifestyles are not always consistent with the message they preach. The puritanical way of life, the personal sacrifices it entails, and the limited scope for independent thought have caused many initially interested orthodox Muslims to turn away from Salafism. Young people and adolescents in particular are receptive to Salafist ideology. However, as soon as they reach adulthood, find employment and have to keep a family, the majority are deterred by the puritanical way of life. They simply no longer have the time to invest so much energy in their faith.

Polarisation and Radicalisation Action Plan

The Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations coordinates the Polarisation and Radicalisation Action Plan, which is geared to prevention, signalling and intervention. The approach for dealing with polarisation and radicalisation is largely a matter for the local authorities. At national level, the focus is on supporting and facilitating this approach. The government safeguards the constitutional right of citizens to practice their religion freely. This includes the right to be orthodox or ultra-orthodox. However, the government will take action when religion leads, for example, to anti-democratic or anti-integrative statements or conduct. The Cabinet is also following a policy designed to promote social cohesion, integration and emancipation. The AIVD is contributing its expertise to the Polarisation and Radicalisation Action Plan.



MOTORCYCLE
WORLD CHAMPION

3. Conclusion

As a result of public debate, government measures and increasing resilience and resistance within the Muslim community, the growth of the Salafist movement in the Netherlands is currently stagnating. Salafism is losing its appeal to potentially receptive Muslims, and it appears that part of the breeding ground for radicalisation has disappeared. Now, all Salafist centres are turning away persons who are associated with extremism or terrorism. Jihadist ideology is no longer propagated, and fewer and fewer violent statements are heard from the Salafist mosques. This does not alter the fact that Salafism is an anti-integrative ideology that can lead to intolerant isolationism, polarisation and – in the worst case – to the development of a parallel society. The stagnation in the growth of the Salafist movement is a recent phenomenon and it is uncertain as yet whether this development will continue in the long term. Therefore it is essential that the government and community remain alert and vigilant. However, the issues must not be underestimated nor must they be overestimated. Inappropriate reactions can damage relations between the groups in Dutch society. It is therefore important to enter into a dialogue with the Salafist community and involve its members as much as possible in initiatives designed to promote integration and social cohesion.



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