



The 'Hofstadgroep'

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Hofstadgroep is an Islamist terrorist organization of nine young Muslims in the Netherlands. The name "Hofstad" was originally the codename the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (Algemene Inlichtingen en Veiligheidsdienst, hereafter: AIVD) used for the group, which leaked to the media in 2003. The name refers to a popular name for the city of The Hague, where some members had been active. The group was influenced by the ideology of Takfir wal Hijra, a violent Islamist organization.

One of the Hofstadgroep's key members is Mohammed Bouyeri, the man responsible for the murder of controversial Dutch writer and filmmaker Theo van Gogh in November 2004. Bouyeri was convicted in July 2005 for planning and carrying out the attack. Thirteen other suspects were taken into custody on various charges in connection with the murder. Nine of the total fourteen suspects were convicted for membership of a terrorist organization and are currently serving various sentences ranging from one year to life imprisonment. In this study, we only consider the nine convicts as the Hofstadgroep and regard a number of other persons that have close links with the group as its 'entourage' or surrounding network. This makes the Hofstadgroep network at least twice as big as the group of nine convicted members.

2. HOFSTADGROEP IN FOCUS

2.1 Historical Background

In 2002, the Hofstadgroep emerged from a diffuse and self-generated autonomous network of about twenty young radical Muslims who met each other to discuss political and religious issues. This network did not have fixed boundaries as its composition changed over time. Some persons participated in only a few meetings, but then dropped out because of disputes or lack of interest. About a dozen persons can be considered the core of the Hofstadgroep network, which even at the time of the arrest of its 'members' can best be described as a network (Interview with Janny Groen, Amsterdam: De Volkskrant, 6-4-2007).

A number of individuals that participated in this group or network gradually developed more radical ideas on Islam and how to be a good Muslim. The discussions also began to focus on the idea/notion of Jihad and attitudes towards non-believers, which included the great majority of all Muslims. The meetings of the network participants took place in a few mosques (in particular the As Soennah mosque in The Hague), as well as in private homes (specifically that of Mohammed Bouyeri in Amsterdam).

Key participants in these meetings were mainly young Dutch Moroccans, including Mohammed Bouyeri and Samir Azzouz, and illegal aliens such as the Moroccan Nouredine Al Fathni and the only older person of the network, the Syrian Redouan al Issar, who was in his forties. The latter is believed to have been Hofstadgroep's spiritual leader (AIVD, 2005:14). Initially, Mohammed Bouyeri was not considered the most conspicuous person within this group. Having translated many radical Islamist texts from English to Dutch and taking on the role of a 'scholar' of this group of friends, Bouyeri's role was considered to be a more passive one.

By 2004, some of the participants in the network had developed extreme radical ideas including plans to use violent means to defend Islam. This holds true particularly in the case of Mohammed Bouyeri. In September 2004 he had reached a stage at which he developed plans to not only threaten but also kill persons who, in his eyes, were insulting Islam or the prophet Mohammed. One of these people was the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh who produced a critical

film on the position of women within Islam called "Submission". The initiative for this film came from Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a former Muslim from Somalia and, at the time, a Member of a liberal political party in the Dutch Parliament. The film was aired on television at the end of August 2004. A few weeks later, Bouyeri was believed to be in the possession of a type HS gun that was made in Croatia (District Court of Amsterdam, 26 July 2005).

To many who knew Mohammed Bouyeri during his childhood it came as a surprise that he would develop extreme ideas and practices. Bouyeri was born in Amsterdam in 1978 as a child of immigrant parents of Moroccan Berber heritage. He grew up in a low-income immigrant neighbourhood in the west of Amsterdam. In elementary school Bouyeri was an exemplary student and was able to advance to higher general secondary education in 1990. In 1995 Bouyeri received his diploma, one of his teachers even praised him as one of the 'bright boys' who would 'probably succeed' (Benschop, 2005). Bouyeri wanted to help his peers to achieve more in Dutch society. He did not have many friends and was shy around girls. At college he switched his studies a number of times (Vermaat, 2005:25), and in 2000, after five years, he dropped out all together.

Bouyeri's first encounter with the police happened in 1997 when he was involved in a fistfight with a police officer. Later in the Spring of 2000 Bouyeri prevented his sister from leaving the house because of her affair with a Moroccan boy and the police were once again involved. A year later he got into a fight with, by then, his sister's ex-lover and drew a knife during the fight. Bouyeri was convicted for the incident and spent twelve weeks in prison, where religion started to become more important for him. In his cell he began to study the Koran (Benschop, 2004).

After his release from prison, Bouyeri worked as a volunteer at a community centre in Amsterdam. He also began to write columns for a neighbourhood newsletter, voicing the needs of the Moroccan youth in the area. In this period he tried to organize and receive funding for a new youth centre, but saw his idea rejected by the authorities. Progressively, the nature of his writings became more and more radical. Under the pseudonym Abu Zubair, he wrote at least a dozen extremist texts on Internet discussion sites visited by young Muslims, in which he made calls upon young Muslims to 'wake up' from their paralysing sleep and to actively take part in the 'defensive Jihad' against

the West. It was from these publications that the AIVD began to take notice of Bouyeri and began to tap his phone (Benschop, 2004).

In the last phase of his radicalization process before killing Theo van Gogh, around summer of 2004, he is believed to have encountered some misfortune in relation to girls. His reputation as the 'scholar' of the network sitting behind his personal computer most of the time was not regarded as high as that of a 'true' Jihadi with plans to travel to places such as Chechnya or Iraq or who would be willing to take concrete action in the Netherlands. One girl is said to have turned him down as her husband in the spring of 2004, which may have provoked Bouyeri to trade his computer for a gun (Interview with Janny Groen, 6-4-2007).

On the morning of Tuesday November 2, 2004, he brutally assassinated filmmaker Theo van Gogh, who had been biking unsuspectingly to work moments before. Bouyeri shot him eight times. Van Gogh died on the spot. Bouyeri then tried to cut his throat, nearly decapitating him, and pinned a five-page letter to his chest with a knife. In this letter Bouyeri referred to ideologies of the Takfir wal Hijra's organization and threatened Western governments, Jews and a number of Dutch politicians including Ayaan Hirsi Ali.

After a shoot out with the police, Bouyeri was arrested near the spot where he had killed Van Gogh. He ran out of bullets and had been shot in the leg. On that day and the following days more than a dozen other participants of the network were arrested at several locations. Two of these suspected members of the Hofstadgroep were arrested after a fourteen-hour siege of their apartment in The Hague. One of them threw a hand grenade at the police when they tried to enter the place. Five members of the arrest team were seriously wounded. Later the police shot the same suspect in the arm to force his arrest (13/129227-04 District Court of Amsterdam.)

The suspects were tried in two separate trials. The first took place in Amsterdam where Bouyeri was sentenced for the killing of Theo van Gogh. He was, among others, convicted and received the maximum sentence possible; life without parole (District Court of Amsterdam, 26 July 2005). He and thirteen other suspects were subsequently brought to the court of Rotterdam which convicted nine of them for membership of a terrorist organization (i.e. the Hofstadgroep). The nine convicted were:

- Mohammed Bouyeri (born 8.3.1978 in Amsterdam, The Netherlands). As he was already serving a life sentence without parole for the murder of Theo van Gogh he did not receive an additional prison term for membership of a terrorist organisation.
- Jason Theodore James Walters, a.k.a. Abu Mujahied Amrik; a.k.a. Abdullah; a.k.a. David (born 6.3.1985 in Amersfoort, The Netherlands). Son of an American father and a Dutch mother. Walters was arrested 10 November 2004 after a 14-hour siege in The Hague. He was sentenced to 15 years of imprisonment for membership in a terrorist organization and five murder attempts.
- Ismael Akhnikh (born 22.10.1983 in Amsterdam, The Netherlands) was arrested 10 November 2004 with Jason Walters in The Hague. He was sentenced to 13 years of imprisonment for membership in a terrorist organization and for being an accomplice to five murder attempts.
- Mohammed Fahmi Boughabe (born 6.12.1981 in Hoceima, Morocco) was arrested 10 November 2004. He was sentenced to 18 months of imprisonment for membership in a terrorist organization.
- Nouredine el Fahtni (born 15.8.1982 in Midar, Morocco) was arrested 22 June 2005 in Amsterdam together with two women (Soumaya Sahla en Martine van den Oever) while carrying a loaded machine pistol. He was sentenced to five years of imprisonment for membership in a terrorist organization and for the illegal possession of arms.
- Youssouf Ettoumi (born 20.10.1977 in Amsterdam, The Netherlands) was sentenced to one year of imprisonment for membership in a terrorist organization.
- Ahmed Hamdi (born 5.9.1978 in Beni Said, Morocco) was living together with Bouyeri. When arrested on 2 November 2004, secret AIVD information was found in his possession. He was sentenced to two years of imprisonment for membership in a terrorist organization.

- Zine Labidine Aouraghe (born 18.7.1978 in Nador, Morocco) was arrested May 2005. He was sentenced to 18 months of imprisonment for membership in a terrorist organization.
- Mohammed el Morabit (born 24.1.1981 in Al Hoceima, Morocco) was sentenced to two years of imprisonment for membership in a terrorist organization.

(District Court of Rotterdam, 10 March 2006).

2.2 *The Hofstadgroep network*

As a diffuse and self generated autonomous network, the Hofstadgroep was not organized in a 'top down' command structure although they did have spiritual support and guidance from outside the country. This support was personified in Redouan al Issar, also known as 'the Syrian'. The external support did not appear to come from any international groups, even though some in the mainstream media tried to point a finger to Al Qaeda. Even some scholars saw a connection. Paul Wilkinson, one of Europe's leading scholars on terrorism, for instance, cited the link between the Netherlands Hofstadgroep and Al Qaeda. He regarded the soft links of the group as an interesting example of Al Qaeda's "small but determined presence" within Europe (Wilkinson, 2005:22). Initially the AIVD also saw a connection to 'a Moroccan Jihad veteran who was allegedly involved in the Casablanca attacks' (AIVD, 2005:14), which disclosed the characteristic transnational element of contemporary Islamist terrorism. However, in subsequent publications and statements, the AIVD reported that the Hofstadgroep had operated autonomously and that there was little evidence to show that it was in some way connected to international terrorist organizations (AIVD, 2005:19).

Since the trial of Mohammed Bouyeri and the other members of the Hofstadgroep, the group is generally regarded as an autonomously operating network with no proven hard links with other terrorist 'organizations' or 'groups', both at home or abroad. The Hofstadgroep – in this study defined as the group of nine persons who were convicted of its membership – was, however, part of a

larger fluid network that included individuals who have been charged and/or convicted of terrorist activities or crimes such as the illegal possession of arms. The most noticeable individuals include:

- Samir Azzouz (born in 1986), a Dutch national of Moroccan descent who had close links to individual members of the Hofstadgroep, though he was never prosecuted for membership of this particular group. In January 2003 he was arrested in Ukraine, together with a friend, while allegedly on his way to join the Jihad in Chechnya. In October 2003, Azzouz and three others (Ismail Akhnikh, Jason Walters and Redouan Al Issar) were arrested in the Netherlands on suspicion of constituting a terrorist cell, but were released for lack of evidence. In June 2004, Azzouz was arrested again. This time in relation to an armed robbery of a supermarket. During a search of his house, police found what they believed to be evidence that Azzouz had been involved in planning several attacks on Dutch targets. However, at trial the judge concluded that there was insufficient evidence to convict Azzouz on the charge of planning terrorist attacks. He was convicted only on the charge of illegal possession of firearms and sentenced to three months in jail. In October 2005 he was arrested again with six others on terrorism charges and finally sentenced for planning terrorist attacks and membership in a criminal organization with terrorist intentions. This group has been labelled by the media as the Piranha group (the AIVD used this name for the case), but is generally believed to be part of the Hofstadgroep. The three other persons convicted were Mohammed Chentouf, Soumaya Sahla, and Nouredine El Fahtni (District Court of Rotterdam, 1 December 2006). The latter had previously been convicted for membership in a terrorist organization (District Court of Rotterdam, 10 March 2006).
- Redouan al Issar, also known as Abu Khaled or "The Sheikh", is a Syrian national. This illegal alien played an important role in the meetings of the Hofstadgroep where Jihad and other topics were discussed. Redouan Al Issar is currently wanted by the Dutch authorities in connection with the activities of the Hofstadgroep. Al Issar is believed to have fled to Syria and

according to family members, was arrested in Hama, Syria (Elsevier, July 14, 2005).

- Rachid Belkacem (born in 1973), a Dutch national of Moroccan descent hosted a number of meetings in his apartment. On the day of Theo van Gogh's murder he drove Redouan al Issar to the airport in Brussels. Belkacem was arrested in London in June 2005 on request of the Dutch authorities. He was extradited and charged with membership in a terrorist organization, recruiting for the violent Jihad, and a number of other offences. In March 2006, he was released provisionally. In July of the same year Belkacem was found dead in his apartment. Friends and family claim he was poisoned, for which the authorities found no proof.
- Martine van den Oever (born in 1979) is a Dutch convert to Islam. She had close contacts to a number of persons that participated in the Hofstadgroep, among them Nouredine El Fahtni and his wife Soumaya Sahla. The three were arrested in June 2005 in Amsterdam. Whereas El Fahtni was convicted for the possession of a firearm when arrested, van den Oever was released in August. In the media she openly proclaimed to have nothing to do with terrorism.
- Soumaya Sahla (born in 1983) is a Dutch national of Moroccan descent. As mentioned above, she is the wife of Hofstadgroep member Nouredine El Fahtni. Following her arrest in Amsterdam in June 2005, she was sentenced to nine months in prison for the illegal possession of arms. She was arrested again in September 2006 and is now serving a four year prison term for contributing to the preparation of a terrorist attack (District Court of Rotterdam, 1 December 2006).

2.3 Methods and Tactics

The methods and tactics of the Hofstadgroep are difficult to distinguish because the 'group' lacked a coherent strategy and most of the crimes were committed by individual members. Nonetheless, in general one could argue that the main aim was that of a classical terrorist organization: to take lives, or threaten to do

so, with the aim of bringing about social change or influencing political decision making (see definition of terrorism as used by the predecessor of the AIVD, the Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst (BVD, 2001:9) or various definitions of terrorism as described in TTSRL's study on academic definitions of terrorism).

The targets of the Hofstadgroep and its individual members were the following: Bouyeri had selected Dutch parliamentarians Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Geert Wilders, and the late Theo Van Gogh. The murder of Van Gogh was deliberately aimed at one specific individual whom the perpetrator – but also his sympathizing friends – regarded as an 'enemy of Islam' (AIVD, 2006:40). Samir Azzouz, who had participated in the network of the Hofstadgroep but who himself was never convicted for membership, is believed to have made plans to attack several institutions. When he was arrested on 30 June 2004 the authorities found in his house maps, photos and itineraries of the parliament building, Schiphol Airport, the nuclear power plant in Borssele, the Defence Ministry and the AIVD building in Leidschendam, including personal notes and sketches of security, lengths of ladders and so on. Samir also possessed cartridge clips for automatic firearms, a silencer, and a bullet-proof vest (Benschop, 2004).

3. HOFSTADGROEP'S AUTOPSY

3.1 Hofstadgroep in Discourse

The general public only came to know the Hofstadgroep after the murder of Theo van Gogh. From that moment on, politicians, policy makers and the media have labelled it as a terrorist organization. In fact, there was very little nuance in the description of the group and it was believed to be very dangerous. Initially, the network was linked to Al Qaeda and regarded as highly dangerous and capable of striking various soft and hard targets. Gradually, more attention was given to the autonomous nature of the network and its lack of professionalism. Despite its rowdy operations and inability to gather the right ingredients for making explosives, the Hofstadgroep was nonetheless always regarded to be a terrorist organization. It was also labeled as such by the court that convicted nine individuals for their membership. Following the verdict, the government had these members nominated for the E.U. list of individuals and organizations associated with terrorism whose financial assets were to be frozen.

The names of the convicted Hofstadgroep members were indeed added to this list (by the E.U. Council Common Position 2001/931/CFSP); a decision that was heavily criticized by the members' advocates. Some perceived it to be an additional punishment because the consequences of being placed on the list are quite serious and affect the personal lives of the Hofstadgroep members, even after they have served their sentences. In general, however, the fact that the Hofstadgroep was labelled a terrorist organization has not been contested.

3.2 Root and Trigger Causes

Due to the more or less loose character of the Hofstadgroep and the fact that it included nine personalities, it is difficult to distinguish the root and trigger causes of terrorist activities for the entire group. Therefore the focus here is placed on Bouyeri, the killer of Theo van Gogh and the only one who actually used violence to achieve his goals. His biography and (political) ideas are well documented and can also be derived from his writings, including the letter he pinned to the body of Theo van Gogh (Bouyeri 2004).

The root causes of his radicalization process and the subsequent murder can be found in two areas: in his personal life and in politics. In his personal life he encountered problems that are typical for many immigrant Muslims in The Netherlands: including (perceived) discrimination, problems between generations, and difficulties with personal identity. Bouyeri was aware of these problems and tried to play an active role in alleviating or eradicating them as a student and even after dropping out of college.

With regard to politics, Bouyeri seemed to have been particularly upset about (perceived) critique of Islam by politicians and public opinion makers and the foreign policies of Western countries with regard to the Muslim world. In addition, there was the availability of a radical Islamist ideology which channelled his worries and anger and provided answers on how to deal with them. These deeper causes in combination with trigger events determined the speed and direction of his radicalization process, which culminated in his terrorist crime in November 2004.

The main trigger causes can also be divided into those related to his personal life and those related to politics. The former include possible events that lack hard proof, such as being turned down by a girl in the spring of 2004,

disappointment over the failure to receive support for his ideas for establishing a youth centre in his part of town, and the possibly negative impact on his life caused by the death of his mother in December 2002. However, Bouyeri's personal trigger causes also include his arrests and his time in prison, during which his spirituality and devoutness moved even further down a radical interpretation of Islam.

The set of trigger causes of a political nature include the US-led intervention in Iraq as well as the polarized debate on Islam in the Netherlands. In a report on Jihad recruits, the AIVD observes a growing number of Muslims reported to feel unfairly treated by opinion makers and opinion leaders, which has a negative impact on radicalization and recruitment (AIVD, 2004:35). One of the most striking trigger event seems to have been van Gogh's film in which Islam was heavily criticised.

In addition to the aforementioned causes there are a number of other factors that facilitated the radicalization of Bouyeri and other members of the Hofstadgroep that are worth mentioning. These are the Takfir wal Hijra ideology (see below), Internet and group processes. The ideology gave direction and legitimacy to Bouyeri's violent intentions. The Internet provided the tool to (anonymously) influence others and to be influenced himself and may explain the speed of the radicalisation process. Various group processes, such as group-think, peer pressure and socio-centric thinking seem to have led to a situation where alternative ideas were gradually blocked out and in which extremist ideas finally remained unchallenged.

Takfir wal Hijra Ideology

The Islamist ideas of the Hofstadgroep have been associated with those of the movement of Takfir wal Hijra (Takfir meaning infidel, and Hijra meaning flight or leaving). This group finds its origins in Egypt during the 1960s. Its intent was to infiltrate a target society (Islamic or Western) in order to re-Islamize it. Takfir wal Hijra is Sunni based and fundamentalist in nature, borrowing on the Salafist ideology, which resembles the Saudi version of Wahhabism. It justifies the use of violence against unbelievers and against perceived renegade Muslims (AIVD, 2006:39). The Takfir wal Hijra ideology also condones un-Islamic behavior by its members in order to carryout an armed struggle against Jews and Christians.

The ideas of the Hofstadgroep are derived from the above, and can better be described as neo-Takfir or Takfir-Light (Volkskrant, 26 November 2005).

Basically, it purposes less strict demands on its followers. Nonetheless, it still contains the element of legitimizing the use of violence (AIVD, 2006:35). According to the AIVD, all neo-Takfirs in the Netherlands are somehow connected in ways that have the characteristics of a network (AIVD, 2006:40). Members of the Hofstadgroep were also claimed to subscribe to the neo-Takfir ideology, which justified their use of violence against Theo van Gogh and the Dutch public in general (AIVD, 2006:35).

3.3 Dynamics of Hofstadgroep's Development

The development of the Hofstadgroep can be described as one of gradual radicalization of its individual members and of the group as a whole, which led to the killing of Theo van Gogh in November 2004. This process started in 2002 and followed a pattern that is relevant for more radical Muslims in the Netherlands (AIVD, 2006:3).

Their radicalization process started with a turning to religion, among other reasons, because of a 'perceived socio-economic deprivation' related to problems of their integration in Dutch society (AIVD, 2006:30). A considerable number of young radicalizing Muslims in the Netherlands come from high-crime inner city areas, or have a criminal record themselves. The strict rules of radical Islam give them an opportunity to escape from crime and become a 'good Muslim' (AIVD, 2006:31). This first step is partly spurred by the Internet, where Muslims are encouraged to focus on what is called 'true' Islam' (AIVD, 2006:29).

As mentioned earlier, in the case of the Hofstadgroep there was also an important additional role for Redouan al Issar, who has been labelled the group's spiritual leader, but who, according to the AIVD, was not the driving force behind their radicalization (AIVD 2005:14). In addition, the radicalization process of the Hofstadgroep was influenced by conflicts affecting the Muslim world (e.g. Iraq and Chechnya) as well as perceived discrimination of Muslims and anti-Muslim attitudes in the Netherlands (AIVD, 2004:33-35; AIVD, 2005:36). The neo-Takfir ideology of the Hofstadgroep provided the 'legitimising of violence' for young Muslims (AIVD, 2006:35).

This combination of factors accumulated in the gathering, writing, translation and distribution of extremist texts, death threats to politicians and public opinion makers, acquiring (materials for) weapons and, finally, the murder of Theo van Gogh.

3.4 *Factors of Decline*

The factors of decline with regard to the Hofstadgroep are all in the sphere of repression.

The foremost factor that can be distinguished is the investigation into the group that started more than two years prior to the van Gogh murder and the subsequent arrests. In 2002, the AIVD had begun investigating Bouyeri after he had published an anti-western article "Values and Norms" on the Internet at the MSN-group Muwahhidin/dewaremoslims (Benschop, 2004). In December 2002, while the AIVD was searching the residence of Nouriddin El Fathni, who roomed with Bouyeri, El Fathni warned the AIVD of violent comments previously made by Bouyeri "that a bomb attack had to be carried out, causing many deaths" (Benschop, 2004).

In the spring of 2003 the authorities were focussing on the role of Redouan al Issar. During this period a number of arrests were made. For instance, Samir Azzouz was arrested but subsequently released in 2003 and 2004. In fact many individuals that participated in the Hofstadgroep were known to the authorities by early 2004, more than half a year before the murder of Theo van Gogh. In July of that year the AIVD wiretapped Bouyeri's home telephone and later his mobile phone. The AIVD was, however, not sure that he was one of the most dangerous figures within the network, and the wire-tapping was stopped in October (Benschop, 2004). Although the police and the AIVD did not prevent the terrorist killing, as a result of the previous investigations, they were able to react swiftly in arresting suspects and providing the necessary evidence to the courts that led to the conviction of nine members of the Hofstadgroep.

The second important factor that played a role in the decline of the Hofstadgroep is the previously mentioned wave of arrests that took place following the van Gogh murder. Bouyeri was captured close to the murder scene after a brief shoot out with police. Two other members of the Hofstadgroep were captured and arrested after a fourteen-hour siege in The Hague. Other suspects were taken into custody in the weeks and months following these events, some of them abroad. It should be stressed that the long and medium term impact of the arrests and convictions remains to be seen. Some of the convicted members of the Hofstadgroep will be released in 2007 and 2008. They may continue to

constitute a threat to society. Moreover, many persons with close ties to the convicted members of the Hofstadgroep network have not been convicted or were never arrested. They might feel the urge to react in some kind of violent way to the fact that their 'friends' are in prison, or may choose not to continue on the path of the violent Jihad. Investigations by Dutch authorities into other persons related to the group are still underway.

A third factor that played a role in the decline of the Hofstadgroep is the set of new laws on terrorism that had been in place since August 2004. On the 10th of March 2006 the Dutch court convicted nine of the suspected fourteen of the alleged members of the Hofstadgroep. Eight of the core members - excluding Bouyeri - were convicted of various charges ranging from attempted murder, violation of the Weapons and Munitions Act and participation in a criminal organization with terrorist intent. The latter verdict was made possible by a new law and allowed the judge to give higher sentences to the individuals that were convicted of being members of the Hofstadgroep. Five persons were found not guilty and were released from custody, including a neighbour of Bouyeri and a brother of one of the other members of the Hofstadgroep.

As a result of the investigations, the arrests and the convictions, it seems that the Hofstadgroep as defined in this study has ceased to exist. However, networks similar or close to the Hofstadgroep still exist and still pose a threat to Dutch society. Although, according to the 2006 Annual Report of the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), they lack leadership and are divided among themselves (AIVD, 2007:33).

4. HOFSTADGROEP'S IMPACT

The impact of the Hofstadgroep can best be analyzed if we rephrase it as the impact of the 'discovery' (at least by the general public) of the existence of a home-grown Islamist terrorist network in the Netherlands. This 'discovery' had an impact on the following different arenas: society in general, the political and executive arena, and the international community.

Dutch society reacted quite frantically to the murder of van Gogh and the subsequent arrests of terrorist suspects. Anti-Muslim sentiments ran high, as did the fear of future large-scale terrorist attacks in The Netherlands. In fact, in the days and weeks after the terrorist incident, the country was in a state of shock

without proper guidance by the authorities. Anger, frustrations and fears resulted in numerous arson attacks on mosques and Islamic schools, and many smaller incidents aimed against Muslims. Some individual politicians played a negative role by contributing to the idea that The Netherlands was now at war and that Dutch Muslims in general were a serious threat to society (Bakker, 2006a: 195-197). According to data from a public opinion poll of the Eurobarometer, terrorism became one of the biggest issues of concern in The Netherlands. Asked "what do you think are the two most important issues facing your country at the moment", terrorism jumped from 12 per cent in Autumn 2004 to 40 percent one year later (Bakker, 2006b:54-55).

After the initial shock had worn off, politicians and executives tried to formulate answers to this perceived new threat. Terrorism became one of the most prominent issues on the political agenda. Many initiatives were launched to increase awareness of terrorism, to investigate the socio-economic situation of young Dutch Muslims, and to try to understand the threat through research and training programs. Those responsible for detecting terrorist threats were heavily criticized and much attention was given to improving the coordination of different authorities which are instrumental in protecting society from terrorism.

Internationally, the case of the Hofstadgroep received a lot of attention from other European countries with large Muslim communities, as well as from the United States. As an autonomously operating network of Muslim immigrants, the Hofstadgroep was an example of a relatively new development, which other countries were afraid could also occur on their territory. Analyzing what had happened in The Netherlands was believed to be essential to improving the counterterrorism policies in several other countries.

5. CONCLUSION

Since the murder of Theo van Gogh in November 2004, much research has been initiated on the case of the Hofstadgroep and the process of radicalization among young Muslims in the Netherlands. Some of the results have already been published (mainly by the AIVD and the University of Amsterdam), other research projects are still in progress.

Much can be learned from these studies, especially because the phenomenon of home-grown terrorism by young immigrant Muslims is relatively new. As many Western countries face similar problems, comparison of cases could bring insight into this particular phenomenon to a higher level. The TTSRL project is an example of such an initiative, which needs following up in order to prevent future organizations similar to the Hofstadgroep from emerging or managing to actually commit terrorist attacks.

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